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WONDER Stories

November

HUGO GERNSBACK Editor

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by Laurence Manning

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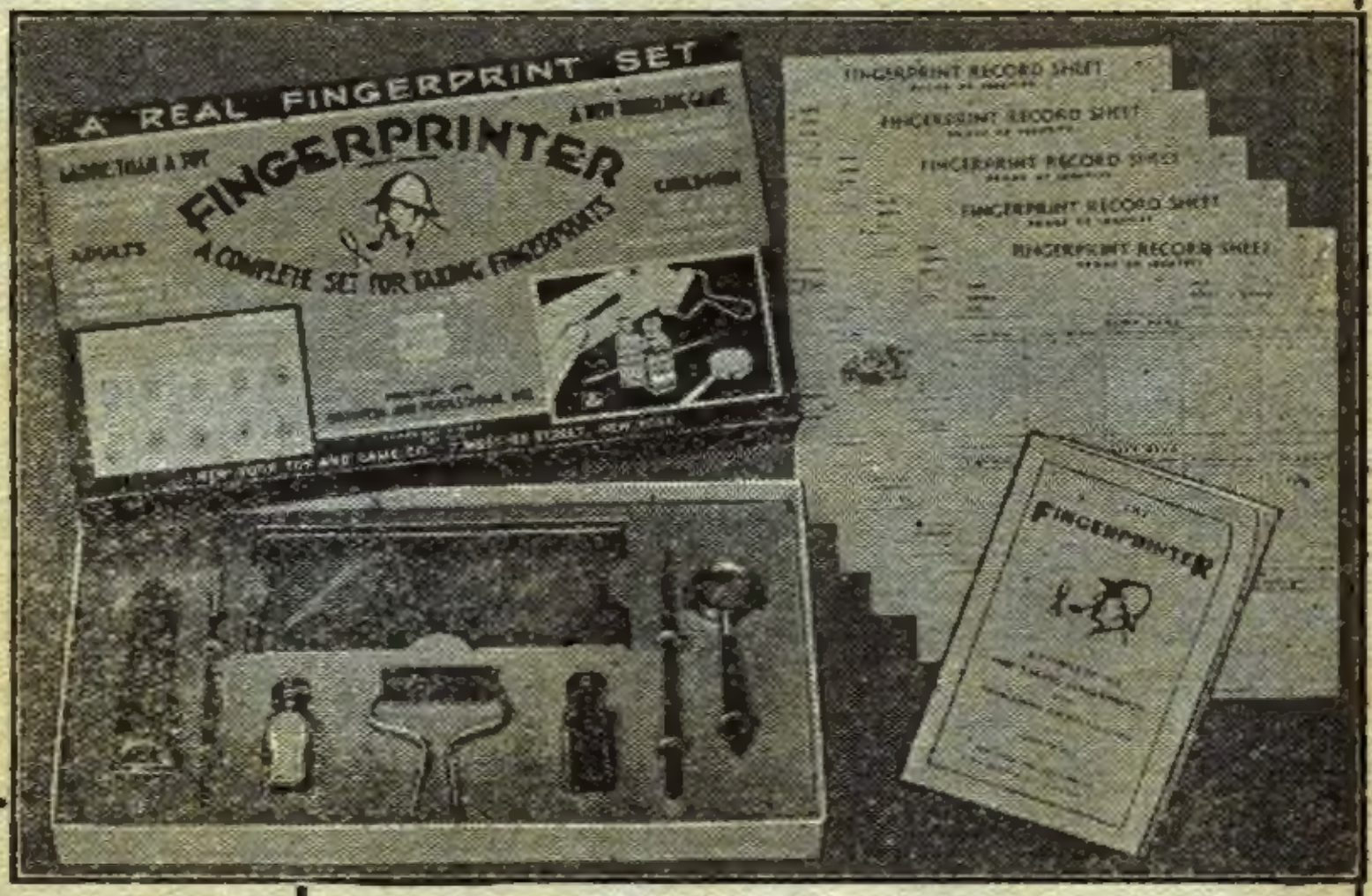

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ON THE COVER this month we see Colonel Marsh and Stanley in the tentacles of a Mech-man, who is taking them to a cage, where they are to exist as inmates of the machine-men's zoo. (From "The Call of the Mech-men," by Laurence Manning.)

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PAUL KORNEKE, JR. N. S.
Pittsburgh, Pa.

FOREIGN STATIONS GALORE

It may interest you to know that yesterday, on my Doerle short wave set at 12:45. P.S.T., I heard CFH at Rio de Janeiro. They came in at 10220 Kcs. and the announcing voice was as clear and strong as on an ordinary telephone.

I am using just 45 volts for both detector and audio stage on the plate. What it would do on 90 volts on the audio I do not venture to say.

At the moment 10.35 P.S.T., I am listening to phone from Japan to Hawaii. No station identification however. Around 16,000 K.C.S. KKD—Kauhuku Hawaii just identified his station.

HARRY V. DAVIS.
Penticton, B.C., Canada.

THE WHOLE WORLD

In the past two days I brought in with my Oscillodyne S-W Set the following foreign stations: 12RO, DJC (this with such volume that I was able to plug in the loudspeaker) and a French station which I was unable to identify, but I believe it to be FYA Pontoise, and also another German station which I have not been able to identify as yet.

On Wednesday LAQ was weak and noisy and DJC was loud and clear, but on Thursday the conditions were reversed. I have received many United States stations, such as W9XAA, W9XF, W8XK, W3XE, etc., etc.

In Short Wave Craft, this set was called A WONDER SET, and I certainly agree.

C. W. KNIERIM.
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WONDER Stories

NOVEMBER
1933

. . . . Prophetic Fiction is the Mother of Scientific Fact . . . .

HUGO GERNSBACK, *Editor-in-Chief*
CHARLES D. HORNIG, *Managing Editor* FRANK R. PAUL, *Art Editor*
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OXYGEN ON MARS

By HUGO GERNSBACK

A RECENT announcement by Drs. Walter S. Adams and Theodore Dunham, Jr., of Mount Wilson Observatory, states that the atmosphere of Mars contains much less than 1% of oxygen.

Astronomers, as a rule, concede after actual observation, that there is such a thing as an atmosphere on Mars; but that this atmosphere now stands deprived of the usual oxygen content, has caused a great deal of surprise in scientific circles. And, while the findings of these two scientists may not as yet be conclusive, and final, there is, of course, the possibility that they are correct. It would be too much to expect that the atmosphere on another planet should be exactly the same as that of our earth. Our science fiction authors usually assume this to be so; but the chances are against them. It is found usually, in nature, that few things or few conditions are exactly alike through such widely separated regions as, for instance, Mars and Earth. Yet, neither the Martians nor our science fiction authors need despair of the fact that there is less than 1% of oxygen in the Martian atmosphere. This does not by any means sound the death-knell of life on Mars. To the contrary, there is exceedingly little oxygen on the mountain-tops of the Himalayas; yet life exists there.

Bacteria and insects can get along perfectly well with very little oxygen; and given enough time to adapt themselves, almost any organism should find it possible to survive. It is, after all, only a matter of adaptation. For example, on the top of the Andes Mountains, there is little precious oxygen; but a tribe of Indians which has lived there for hundreds of years found no difficulty in adapting themselves to the conditions. As time passed, the chests of the natives became larger, until they now measure on the average of 55 inches; which is an enormous chest development, but made necessary because of the low oxygen content of their surroundings.

It is safe to say that, if the human race were gradually deprived of their oxygen supply, the race would still go on; providing the development was gradual and spread over thousands of years.

At first, the findings of the two scientists must be perplexing, particularly to chemists. It seems unreasonable, at first, to believe that there can be an atmosphere containing water vapor with almost a total absence of oxygen. To enhance the unreasonableness, it should be remembered that scientists consider it proven, by actual observation, photography, and otherwise, that the two poles of Mars are clad with "snowcaps," similar to the condensations of snow which prevail on our own earth. It may well be that there are other gases or other combinations of gases which exist in the Martian atmosphere, a thing not so impossible as it might appear at first. Even in our own atmosphere, we have a dozen or more gases creating the mixture which we call air. That there may be a totally different mixture on Mars is within the bounds of possibility. Heat conditions, the ultra-violet radiation from the sun, the lessened gravity on Mars, all may have something to do with it. It is also well known that Mars does not seem to have the same amount of vegetation which we have on our own earth. Thus plants, for instance, absorb the carbonic acid which is poisonous to animal life and, in large forests, liberate ozone. There being a comparatively sparse growth of plant life on Mars, conditions naturally will be different. It should be noted that plant life on earth contributes a good deal to our own atmosphere.

It should also be remembered that Mars, being a much smaller body than the earth, is also a much older body. In the course of eons, the greater part of the water has vanished from Mars, leaving the planet now quite arid. Naturally, this vanishing of all of the water must have had something to do with the vanishing oxygen. It seems reasonable to believe that this is the fate in store for the Earth, in the general evolution of the planet. Of course, at the present, we do not have to worry about the water supply, which is still abundant on this planet, but conditions will certainly be much different 10 or 25 million years hence; and, by that time, it is certain that the oxygen content of the atmosphere will have changed accordingly. It is also certain that, during that time, the evolution of the earth's inhabitants will also keep in step and, while life will change, it will still exist; just as it did during the Archean stage on earth when it was in full swing, although the atmosphere was so laden with water that whatever creatures then existed had to get along in a steaming hot air bath from birth until death.

(Illustration by Paul)

A small, golden robot perched at one end; his head was cubed and many-sided, and he had two eyes and a mouth, but lacked a nose.

THE LUNAR CONSUL

By SIDNEY PATZER

PART ONE

The author of "The Great Invasion" returns with one of the greatest scientific mysteries it has been our pleasure to publish.

When will this era of unequality end? We must admit that an ideal situation is not one in which millions are stricken with poverty, while a minority have risen to such heights that their power is unlimited. The Biblical phrase, "All men are created equal" does not hold true in a world that worships the golden calf. What will the outcome be?

The answer presented in this tale is indeed a possibility. Perhaps you would rather continue living in this imperfect world of ours—or you may prefer the Utopian situation propounded by the "Lunar Consul."

In any case, your interest will be held from the first page to the last. A story you will not soon forget.

● **J.** Jeremiah Lawson, youngest undercover man in the Department of Justice and third assistant to the Chief of the American Secret Service, lighted one cigarette from the butt of another, and stopped his pacing long enough to stare abstractedly from the window of his tiny office into the street. A puzzled frown creased his handsome, clean-cut face: his blue eyes were clouded with anxiety. On any ordinary day, Lawson would have found interest in the view of the streets, but on that afternoon of February 3, 1947, he was too worried about more important happenings to consider the crowds that wandered aimlessly to and fro. And others in the world were worrying. Lawson ground out the cigarette he had just lighted, and reached into his pocket for another.

The first notice of any impending wrong had come with the first full moon in January. Over most of the world, on that night, the air was clear. There were few clouds anywhere, and the phenomenon was visible to the naked eye.

People, everywhere, stopped and stared, rubbed their eyes, wiped their glasses, and stared again. Millions must have gaped at the moon that night. For, plainly discernible on Luna's northern hemisphere, and seen for the first time, there appeared the markings with which we are all familiar:

FEB1
1947

Every child, of course, knows of that inscription now, but younger readers probably cannot appreciate the enormity of our surprise, when the world saw it there for the first time.

Not that the warning was taken seriously when it first appeared. Quite the contrary. After the first amazement had passed, and for several days following, people just laughed about it. They remembered to what lengths the advertising manager of Compressed Foods had gone to announce his new product ("A Meal in the Hole of Your Tooth"), and thought that Universal Motors would show their new helicopter, or something in that order, during the month of February. At first, too, there was considerable argument about the "FEB1"; many persons thought that it was code. The more obvious explanation of "February 1" didn't strike them until later.

Scientists, naturally, were tremendously interested, and they raised the first cry of alarm. Every observatory on earth bent to the task of finding out what had caused the figures to appear, and when it was discovered that the inscription was not the

projection of some mammoth magic lantern, but that the date was actually *gouged* out of the face of the moon, astronomers drew many an uneasy breath. It seemed incredible, then, that any human agency could have had the power to perform such a monstrous task, and with such rapidity. No human being, so far as the knowledge of the earth went, had ever been able to fly to the moon, and anything resembling a disintegrating ray of such stupendous strength was unknown.

And, when the computation of the size of the figures was made and released to the newspapers, serious thinkers everywhere received it with awe. Selenographers figured that the downstroke of the "F" was 400 miles long by 16 wide, and must have extended 15 miles into the interior of the satellite. The letter "B," for example, cut through the eastern ranges of the Lunar Alps, skirted to the north of Cassini, ran through most of the Lunar Caucasus, and practically demolished the crater of Aristillus. The "1947" extended from 50 miles east of the crater of Copernicus well into the Mare Tranquilitatis herself; the base of the "4" neatly bisected the Mare Vaporum. Even those who took no heed of the warning were impressed by the magnitude of its dimensions. ("The largest advertising coverage in the world".)

As a matter of fact, men sprang up predicting the end of the world, churches were packed to capacity, and guesses were endless, but business went on as usual. And it is hard to see what the earth could have done about it, anyway.

There was nothing tangible to fear. Until February 1 there was no change that anyone could have noticed; there was no certainty, even, that there *was* a warning. There were only conjectures. Some thought that intelligent Lunar beings were announcing an invasion of the earth; others, for reasons equally fantastic, preferred to think that Martians, or Venusians, were responsible. Revivalists spoke of the mark of the Finger of God, and of the forthcoming resurrection of the flesh.

It was also believed that the pits on the moon's surface were legitimately dug, first tunnelled and then blown in, by men of unknown origin and nationality, but of the earth. Lawson himself was inclined to suspect a hoax. Nobody guessed the correct explanation; Lawson least of all.

The first of February was ushered in much as, 31 days before, the world had celebrated the New Year. Sober and frugal persons retired at their usual hours and slept the sleep of the thrifty. Others stayed awake till midnight, and, when nothing terrible happened, went to bed, feeling vexed and cheated. And those who made an event of January 31 were unable, as a rule, to appreciate the extent of the catastrophe, so that full understanding did not come about until the afternoon of February 1, and much later in isolated communities.

But Lawson was one of those who were curious enough to remain awake until midnight: "just to find out what it's all about," as he said to himself. He made himself comfortable in his little apartment on G Street; put on his slippers and bathrobe; turned the radio low enough so that it wouldn't disturb him perchance he didn't like the program. He read through the three evening papers; then glanced into a short history of Russia. By 11:30 he was feeling rather sleepy. He pulled out his gold watch, looked at it, replaced it in his pocket, and suddenly yawned.

● The first thing that struck Lawson as unusual was that his watch had stopped: that it had stopped at 11:53 meant nothing to him at the moment. He held it to his ear, shook it, but could detect no ticking. And Lawson, at first, didn't link the stopping of the watch with anything else.

"Lord!" he said to himself, "Now I won't know when it's midnight."

He looked at his watch reproachfully, then said with a slight start of surprise:

"What in the world—" Absently, he began to wind his watch, forgetting that he had already wound it two hours before. The stem came off in his hand.

His watch, and the little bit of metal he had pulled from it, were grey. He rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, then

noticed the heavy gold signet ring on his right hand.

"Must be seeing things," he muttered.

Neither his watch nor the ring looked like gold to him, as they should. He took his penknife; picked at the back of the watch-case. Instead of opening with the familiar click, it bent slowly under the pressure. In amazement, Lawson used the cutting edge of his knife: the case flaked, was soft and easy to cut. And even in taking the ring from his finger, he bent it, so that he could not replace it.

Lawson abruptly thought he understood. That ridiculous date on the moon was not so ridiculous after all! He looked at his fountain pen. He saw what he had expected to see: the clip was no longer gold, but lead.

The next morning, February 1, 1947, was a date of fear and apprehension throughout the world. Washington was more silent than usual that morning, Lawson noted. It was the quiet before the storm. For, at some time during the night preceding, by a hastening of radio activity, not at the time understood, *the world's supply of gold had been turned to lead!* —watches and clocks, rings and jewelry, coins and hoarded ingots. What had been wealth was wealth no longer.

This knowledge came slowly, fitfully, and then in a great wave of consternation. At the request of President La Follette, the newspapers had tried to keep the full extent of the calamity from the public, but some news had slipped out. And the public had seen, with their own eyes, objects of gold turn to lead. If Mrs. Smith's wedding ring had turned to lead, or even turned green, her friends would have been discreetly amused. But when the wedding rings of a million Mrs. Smiths turned to lead, and when the gold watches of a million Mr. Smiths also turned to lead, it was no longer a matter for joking.

There was the case, for example, of the South American liner that had unloaded bars of lead at New York, bars that had been a ten million dollar shipment of gold. Perhaps that wouldn't have reached the papers at once, if the captain hadn't shot himself to escape what he must have thought was his disgrace. And there was the case of the rich old woman on Park Avenue who complained to the police that someone had stolen into her mansion during the night and replaced her hoarded gold coin with leaden slugs. The papers printed such things as news, and the public began to see a correlation between their individual losses and the losses of others. Treasury officials at Washington, and in Paris, under the Seine, stared helplessly at their reserves. They saw not gold, but only lead. They knew.

The banks were in a panic. Western European officers, who were out to lunch at the first official announcement, glumly looked at each other, angrily rattled their knives and forks, leapt to telephones. They disbelieved. In Asia, foreign representatives called American officials to ask them to verify the rumors. They too disbelieved. Men in the silver states smiled, and Chinese and Mexicans smiled. Silver rocketed to 2 dollars an ounce, $2.12 an ounce, $2.38.

And then came chaos. Silver was worth over 2 dollars an ounce, was it? Two dollars' worth of what? By what measure was it worth two dollars?

The world's financial system had been based on gold too long. Silver had always had its value, but its value was based on its worth in gold. With no gold as a yardstick, where was silver? Finance was a sick old man. Finance was "sick to its stomach," and vomited lead. Finance was sick, and no doctor had any of that golden medicine that had formerly worked a cure. The towering, thin-based golden pyramid on which the world had erected its credit, suddenly and completely collapsed. Credit heaved, groaned, tossed restlessly, and fell with a thundering crash.

People ran for the banks, and drew out paper: "redeemable in gold on demand," "redeemable in lawful currency." And there was no gold. The lawful currency was paper.

Governments all over the world contributed to the chaos by issuing reassuring notes, featuring the solvency and stability of the world's paper. But there was no

stability to it. Everywhere, especially in Germany (where many persons still remembered the inflation period of 1920-23), people exchanged their paper for goods, comestibles, non-perishable commodities. Frantically, the treasury department in Washington deluged the East with silver dollars: men refused to accept paper based on gold; insisted on silver certificates. Overnight, silver mines started working at full blast.

Prices went crazy: a bushel of wheat in Omaha was worth one silver dollar, in Chicago two silver dollars, in New York $1.75 in silver. The Shanghai tael, with its Chinese ounce, suddenly became the price barometer. One tael bought ten bushels of wheat, then twelve bushels.

France, which had had half the world's available gold supply, found herself drowning in a sea of lead: her Asiatic squadron was instructed to load all the white metal available in Indo-China. India gracefully fell back to the silver rupee; the Mexican peso and the Spanish peseta became of increasing importance in the world's business. Commerce fought and struggled to regain its breath, to snatch something of value from the dying embers of its financial fire.

● There had been that sign on the moon, Lawson mused. And now, on the afternoon of February 3, the thing was still a mystery. It was a well-established fact that the gold was gone. But who—or what—had taken it? Scientists and governments were equally mystified.

Washington was a madhouse. Lawson could see that. And, if there were riots in Washington, usually so peaceful and phlegmatic concerning world events, then London must also be a madhouse, and Paris, and Berlin, and Tokyo. Lawson had even heard rumors of a communist uprising in Chicago.

The door to Lawson's office opened, and a young negro attendant entered.

"What is it, Strick?" Lawson asked.

"Mr. Lawson, there's a young lady outside to see you," the negro replied.

"To see me?" Lawson asked, surprised.

"Well, no," the negro said. "She didn't come exactly to see you. She came to see the chief, but the chief won't see her. She sat out in that anteroom all day yesterday, and she's been sittin' out there all day today—"

"Yeah," Lawson interrupted. "But what does she want?"

"She won't say what she wants. She asked for the chief yesterday, and she asked for him today, and she's getting good and mad. Mr. Jenkins thought, maybe, you could calm her down a bit, maybe, and—"

"How does she look?"

"She's sure a good-looker, Mr. Lawson. You ought to see that blonde hair. She was waitin' out there all day yesterday, and she says she's getting sick and tired of it. Mr. Jenkins thought—"

"All right," Lawson said. "Show her in."

She was better looking than Strick had intimated, Lawson thought. She was small and neat, with a slightly saucy snub nose, and her marcelled hair was even blonder than Lawson had expected.

"Mr. Lawson?" the girl asked.

He nodded politely.

"I am Madeleine Henderson," she said. "I don't like to interrupt you, but I think I have something interesting to show you."

"Indeed," Lawson said.

"My father, as you may have heard—"

"Was Carl Henderson, chief of the government chemical departments?"

"Yes," Miss Henderson replied.

Lawson knew of the case. Professor Henderson had disappeared early in August, on the way home from the theatre, and nothing had been seen of him since. There had never been any clue as to his whereabouts, so far as Lawson knew. His disappearance had been complete. Henderson had been highly respected both in government and scientific circles.

Lawson looked at the girl.

"I know of the case, of course," he said. Why in the world didn't this Madeleine hire a private detective if she wanted to find out what had become of her father, he wondered. And at this late date, too.

"If it had been my father, alone, who

had disappeared—" her voice choked. "Well, there wouldn't be much to go by. But look at this, from the Philadelphia *Public Ledger.*"

"August 3, 1946," Lawson read. "Was that the same date?"

The girl nodded.

He read:

"The prey of a kidnaping or extortion plot, Prof. Eric Vane, famed astrophysicist, was whisked from his home on Highland Drive late last night, according to a statement made to the police by Mrs. Vane, the former Jessie Gobel, of this city. The alleged kidnaping took place shortly before midnight. Professor Vane's study, which is on the ground floor, was evidently the scene of a terrific struggle, Detective Sergeant Ralph O'Donohue reported. Papers were strewn over the floor, and a valuable replica of Epstein's Maternity was found smashed near one of the two open windows. Mrs. Vane, who is prostrated at the palatial Vane estate, could give no explanation of her husband's disappearance, O'Donohue asserted . . . ."

"Coincidence?" Lawson asked.

"No, Mr. Lawson," the girl replied. "I'm sure it's not coincidence. My father knew Vane very well. And he knew some of these others. Here's one from *The Chicago Daily Tribune,* August 4."

"A gangster kidnaping was perpetrated late yesterday afternoon, when Samuel Berglied, retired professor of biochemistry at the University of Chicago, was abducted from his apartment in N. La Salle street, according to a statement made to the police by William Miller, 60, janitor of the apartment building. 'I heard loud voices in his rooms,' Miller declared, 'and then somebody said, "Come on, out of the window with you," and by the time I got back from phoning, there was no answer when I rapped.' It was quite dark outside, at the time, Miller alleged. Professor Berglied was reputed to have amassed a fortune by the invention of a new method of propelling motor vehicles, it is said."

"Well," Lawson said. "It is a bit queer."

"Oh, there are others, lots of them," the girl remarked. "Here are two more."

CHAPTER II

No Coincidence

● Lawson courteously took two more clippings from her, one from *The Herald and Examiner* (Los Angeles), for August 5, 1946, the other from *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer,* same date. What was the girl getting at, he wondered.

The first read:

"The continued absence of L. R. Manning, 64, professor of mathematics at the Pasadena Institute of Technology, who lived at 374 Yucca street, N., continues to baffle police today. Professor Manning left the experimental laboratories of the Institute late Wednesday evening, and has not been seen since. Foul play is feared."

And the second:

"Baffled in their search for the murderer or abductor of Warren Schulte, 58, professor of physics at the University of Washington, police are continuing their grilling of all suspicious persons today. The latest suspect, who gave his name as Bernard Corson, of Salem, Ore., was picked up by Mischa Bloom, campus policeman, when he showed an alleged undue interest in the smoking ruins of Johnson Hall, which was destroyed by a blast of unknown origin shortly after professor Schulte's mysterious disappearance.

"Schulte, according to Dean George Alton of the College of Science, had been conducting experiments on the theory of the influence of infra-red rays* on metals. Corson claimed to be only a sightseer. 'I saw that there was something wrong, and I wanted to see what it was,' Corson is asserted to have remarked."

"Well," Lawson said. He didn't know quite what to do with this attractive young lady who had practically forced her way into his office. This, he thought, was well outside his province as investigator.

"You may wonder why I have asked you to read all that," the girl declared. "I wanted to show you, without any doubt, that there was some concerted movement to do away with all of those scientists.

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*Vibrations below that of visible red light.

Because I fully believe that the disappearance of those men, including my father, has something directly to do with what happened to the world's gold supply!"

What kind of a pipe dream is that, Lawson thought. But he asked:

"What makes you think so?"

The girl hesitated.

"Over a year ago," she said finally, "my father told me that he had discovered a way of turning gold into lead!"

"What!" Lawson cried, his bored appearance of politeness leaving him as he whirled in his chair.

"Over a year ago," she repeated firmly, "my father told me that he had turned gold into lead."

"But—" Lawson began.

"Of course," the girl interrupted, "he thought of it only scientifically, for he realized the consequences of such a discovery. He told only me, and made me swear never to tell anyone else. He realized the dire consequences, should some unscrupulous person get hold of it. I have never told anyone, and I'm sure he never did."

Lawson kept the suspicion that suddenly mounted within him to himself.

"And now that the gold has turned into lead all over the world," the girl continued, "I feel sure that somebody has found out about my father's discovery. He *wouldn't* have used it himself."

Could it be possible, Lawson mused, that some power had wrested her father's invention from him?—that someone had stolen it, and put him out of the way to silence any objections he might have had?

Of course, Henderson might have been joking. And there might have been something to the idea of a coincidence. But, it was the first tangible lead that Lawson had seen turn up in connection with the mystery that now engrossed the world. Here, he knew, was something worth following; at least until he became certain that there was no connection between the events.

Lawson, unexpectedly, pulled out his new nickel-plated watch.

"Mm," he said. "Five-thirty. Mad—, er, Miss Henderson, would you care to have dinner with me tonight? We'll be able to talk this thing over more fully," he added quickly, as he noted that she seemed on the point of refusing.

"Why, yes," she accepted, blushing prettily. "If you really think we can work out some solution."

"I certainly do," Lawson said seriously.

On the way to a little restaurant off New York Avenue that Lawson knew of, they talked of possibilities. Neither paid any attention to the throngs of people gathered everywhere, idly chattering. And, in the little restaurant, subconsciously aware of the low crooning of the radio, they talked of what the disappearances might have meant.

"There certainly must be a link, somewhere," Lawson said. "Something we can tie together. Some way to get to the bottom of this business."

The girl nodded.

"There *must* be," she agreed. "Oh, Mr. Lawson, if you only knew how much it would mean to me to get my father back! He can't be free, or he would return of his own accord, or at least write me. And he's not—" the girl shivered.—"He's alive, I know he's alive. But he simply cannot get away. I'm sure—"

The girl's low, intense voice was cut off sharply by a strident hooting that came from the radio. A waitress hurried toward it, but before she reached it, a commanding, metallic warning broke from the machine.

"Stand back!" it said. "Stand back!"

Then:

"For the good of Mankind," it began, in sharp, stabbing syllables, and repeated:

"For the good of Mankind. For the good of Mankind." The voice stopped momentarily, then continued:

"I am Mithra, Consul of Luna, Atlas. My message is simple; easily understood. I caused your gold to turn to lead. I can turn the lead back to gold. I have the power to do so, but do not wish it." The voice went on.

● The Consul of Luna was about to put the world under a scientific management; his own, he said. He was going to

end wars, famine and pestilence and poverty. He had planned new cities, scientifically constructed, "not beehives and anthills." There would be no more nations; only one great Commonwealth, which was to be ruled by Mithra, Lunar Consul, benevolent despot. There should be work and food for all, and more time for leisure. The race would be eugenically improved: there would be no more misfits, idiots, cripples. The Consul had shown an infinitesimal part of his strength: if more lessons were needed, he would give them. He demanded that the rulers and public men of the earth should swear allegiance to him, publicly and in all humility. A new era would dawn. He would give other messages.

"You can locate me only if I so wish," he concluded. "But I can find you, ferret you out, blast you from existence. I give seven days. For the good of Mankind. I am Mithra, Consul of Luna, Atlas."

Lawson and the girl looked at each other in amazement when the identical message, in the same voice, was given in French; then, after a pause, in Spanish; then in German and Italian; after that, in several languages Lawson did not recognize. The voice finally clicked off abruptly, and, after an interval, the regular station announcement of WJZ came over the air.

"That settles it," Lawson declared. "It was no accident."

He leaned across the table.

"You say your father knew all those other scientists who were abducted?"

"No, he didn't *know* them all, but knew *of* them all. He knew Vane very well, and the one in Pasadena. And he knew some of the others; others whose clippings I haven't shown you. One of his very best friends, Henri Nézan, who had an observatory in Morocco, disappeared two weeks before my father did. And there was Professor Hermann in Munich; and Berglied, at one time, was his teacher."

"Vane," Lawson said thoughtfully. "Vane. Wasn't there a person by that name who was working on disintegrators?"

The girl shook her head.

"I didn't know about that," she said.

Lawson took from his billfold the halftone of Professor Eric Vane that accompanied the newspaper clipping. Vane did not look old—a man, perhaps, in his middle forties—except for the bushy, snow-white hair surmounting his cold, aristocratic face. It was a striking face: there was something grim and implacable about it, but, too, there was justice there, and kindness.

"There's something familiar," Lawson muttered. "I wish I could remember . . . . You're sure your father didn't tell anyone of his discovery?"

"I'm practically certain."

Lawson looked undecided. Then, with sudden resolution, he said:

"Miss Henderson, we have something to work on. I have scarcely a theory as to what has become of your father and the other men, and who—or what—the Lunar Consul is, I have no way of knowing. But it's evident enough that somebody—or something—has taken and used the ideas of your father; probably of the others, too. To be perfectly frank, yours is the first clue I've had, and it promises results of some kind."

"You're with me, then?" the girl asked eagerly. "You'll help me find my father?"

"I'm with you!" Lawson said. "From now on we're allies; allies against the Lunar Consul!"

Madeleine Henderson put out a small, capable hand.

"Shake on that!" she demanded.

J. Jeremiah Lawson and Madeleine Henderson shook hands. A new resolution shone in their eyes.

Lawson didn't go to the office the next morning. He had breakfast, bought the *Herald* and the *Post*, and returned to his apartment. There, before scanning the headlines, he telephoned Felix Kortner, a young and eccentric experimenter. In a way, he disliked Kortner, but he respected the trickiness of his mind. Kortner, at the first hint that something unusual was brewing, promised to come at once. Lawson was expecting Madeleine Henderson at 9:30: today they were going to work out a plan of action.

Both newspapers featured the first spoken announcement of the Lunar Consul: the speech was printed verbatim. And Lawson learned something he had not known the night before. The message, seemingly, was broadcast from a hundred places at once, for it drowned out, in a sounding sea of interference, every sending station on earth. All those who had receiving sets heard the sharp, metallic syllables. Those with televisors received no additional information: their screens were clouded, oddly, by what seemed to be a vapory, golden dust.

● The *Herald* was inclined to be skeptical: as a pro-administration paper, it had soft-pedalled the gold loss. It urged that the government do something immediately to trace the "crank" who had broken into the nation's broadcast. The *Post*, however, was more serious: it printed the news, quoted public figures (most of whom seemed merely annoyed), and favored an immediate international conference to deal with the problem.

Both papers gave the impression of a distinct bewilderment; their front pages were taken up with accounts of the rioting in New York, the stock-market crash, the unrest in European capitals, and the tremendous fluctuations in commodity values as expressed in terms of the silver ounce. Each ran stories of the first outright defiance of the Consul; the Japanese, far from being bewildered, rattled the sword. Perhaps overconfident, from his easy victories in Asia, the Mikado denounced the broadcast as a Chinese plot, and mobilized his navy and troops.

Lawson had time to finish most of the paper before Kortner, for once in his life excited and voluble, entered the room.

"Did you hear that they have mounted machine guns on the Capitol?" he asked, his eyes round and shining. "Did you read about those Japs? I hear that the army has recalled all men on leave. You should have seen the mob in front of the White House. Have—"

"Slow up," Lawson said blandly. "Have a chair. I've got something to tell you that may be really important." He threw his newspapers to the floor. "I've read the news, but nobody knows what it's all about. I think today we may find out some facts; that is, if we've got sense enough."

Kortner looked at him curiously, sat down.

"Well, go ahead," he submitted. "What do you know, Jerry? What you said over the phone didn't make so much sense."

"Listen!" Lawson said. Carefully, so as to be sure of laying all the facts he had before him, he told Kortner of the happenings of the day before: how Madeleine Henderson had come to his office; of her surprising statement concerning her father's discovery; of his disappearance, and of the disappearance of the other scientists, how the warning broadcast had broken in on their conversation.

"It certainly sounds odd enough," Kortner said. "But where is this Henderson woman?"

"She ought to be here any minute now," Lawson said.

"And how are you going about it. Trying to find Henderson?" Kortner asked.

"We've got to find a solution today," Lawson said, ignoring Kortner's question. The doorbell rang. "Ah, here she is now."

Introductions over, Madeleine came immediately to the point.

"Have you anything to work on yet?" she asked Lawson.

"Not a thing," Lawson said. "That's why I called Kort up here. Together, we ought to get something out of nothing."

"Well, let's see," Kortner said. "I haven't got this thing straightened out in my own mind yet. Go ahead, Jerry."

Lawson spoke slowly, as if to make everything perfectly clear to himself. Then, too, he watched Kortner; he had not liked the look in his eyes when he first saw the girl.

"One: Professor Henderson discovers a way of turning gold to lead. Two: a year after his discovery, the world's gold, somehow, is turned to lead. Three: six months before this event, Professor Henderson mysteriously disappears, and at the same

time, numerous other scientists, all leaders in their field, also disappear. Four: Professor Henderson has told no one of his secret; no one, that is, except his daughter, whom he swore to secrecy. Right?"

"Right," the girl replied.

"Now. Question one: How did this—this—Menace learn of your father's invention? Did he know about it before the kidnaping, or did he find it out afterward, and then make use of it? Or did the Menace read his mind? Or did your father earlier publish incomplete results in some scientific periodical, from which the Menace was able to deduce that he knew more than he was publishing? Or did he communicate the news, in strictest confidence, and without giving details, to some fellow scientist?"

"Wait," Madeleine said. "That last. Yesterday I was absolutely certain that he had told nobody; had made no mention of it to anyone else. But last night, while I was looking through some old letters in my desk—my father used to leave his letters everywhere—I found the last page of one that must have been meant for him, because I never remember having seen it before. Here it is."

Lawson took the piece of note paper, and read aloud from the forceful, angular handwriting.

". . . . fully appreciate your unwillingness to tell me the process you used in your last experiment, and applaud your resolution not to publish. The world is topsy-turvy enough as it is. In a way, it's too bad, as, rightly handled, the process might work as a catalyst for world betterment. But that's your business. Nézan will be startled when I tell him. Best regards to you, and if there is anything new, let me know.

Eric."

"Eric?" Lawson asked.

"Professor Vane," the girl said. "My father knew him very well."

"That changes the complexion of things somewhat," Lawson mused. "You don't suppose Vane—?"

"As you can see from the letter, my father didn't tell him anything about it."

"Who is this Nézan?" Kortner broke in.

"Why, he had an observatory in Morocco. My father knew him, or had known him, very well, but he was an especial intimate of Professor Vane's. Vane went nearly every summer to see him."

CHAPTER III

On the Trail

● "Had your father ever been there?" Lawson asked.

"We both were there four years ago, when I was 15," the girl replied. "Nézan had quite an establishment west of Sefrou, which is about twenty kilometers into the Atlas mountains from Fez."

"Now slow up a bit; slow up a bit," Lawson cried excitedly, as the other two looked at him in surprise. "We're running into something there. This thing is getting beyond coincidence."

"I don't see it," Kortner said.

"I don't see it myself," Lawson retorted. "But look here: Henderson tells something of his experiment to Vane, and Vane says he is going to tell his chum Nézan. A year later Henderson's carefully guarded experiment becomes a world catastrophe: the gold is turned to lead. Vane knew of it, but didn't know the details; it is probable that Nézan knew of it, but Vane couldn't have told him the details, as he didn't know them himself. But Henderson gave it up some way: perhaps after Vane, or Nézan, kidnaped him."

"Or the Lunar Consul," Kortner interpolated.

"Or the Lunar Consul," Lawson agreed, unwillingly. "Although a being from the moon doesn't sound probable."

"It wasn't probable that the world's gold would be destroyed overnight, either," Kortner suggested.

"And then the Atlas mountains," Lawson continued. "'Mithra, Consul of Luna, Atlas,' he calls himself."

"But does it sound logical that your Menace would give himself away as easily as that? Aren't there Atlas mountains on the moon?" Kortner objected.

"Well," Lawson flared angrily. "So far as I can see, there isn't anything logical

about the whole thing. This seems to hang together a bit, anyway. Oh, say," he added, more calmly, turning to Madeleine, "Was that radio voice Vane's?"

"No," the girl said.

"Or your father's?"

"Gracious, no!" she said laughing. "Nothing remotely resembling either of them. And it wasn't Nézan, either. Why, it wasn't *human!*"

Not Henderson, eh? It wouldn't be likely, Lawson thought, that Madeleine would go so far to shield her father. He had heard the voice: it didn't seem quite human, for a fact.

"Have you a theory?" Kortner asked mockingly.

"I don't think I'd dignify the idea by calling it that," Lawson replied. "But so far, all roads seem to lead to Morocco. Or two roads, at any rate. The Vane-Nézan road leads that way, and then there is the Atlas part."

"But," the girl said, "Nézan himself disappeared. And so did Vane."

"There are plenty of loose ends, that's certain," Lawson declared gloomily.

Kortner posed a question of his own.

"For a starter, suppose we pick on Nézan. What was he like?"

"Why, he was pleasant enough," Madeleine said. "A bit aloof, perhaps, but very kind. He had only one marked peculiarity; his seemingly unreasonable hatred of the Japanese. And he treated his Arab help very well."

"And Vane?"

Madeleine hesitated. "Vane? Why," she said, "I hardly know what to say. I have never felt that I knew him very well, although I've often seen him. He kept himself apart: he was a brilliant man, wealthy, somewhat of a recluse—he told me once that he could cut off two fingers of each hand and still be able to count his friends on his fingers—he was even-tempered, capable of prodigious effort."

"But given the chance, might he not be the type to attempt to turn the world into an experimental laboratory?" Kortner insisted.

"Well," Madeleine hesitated again. "Vane impressed me as the sort who might be expected to do anything, if any scientific good might come of it."

"And Vane knew this Nézan, you say?"

"Very well."

"You may be right, Jerry. The only clues we have lead to Vane. If we could find Vane . . . ."

"And Vane, the last we heard, was looking toward Morocco," Lawson said.

The three exchanged glances.

"It's an off-chance, but it might work," Kortner remarked.

"A poor excuse to go chasing off to Morocco, but it's the best I can think of," Lawson said.

"And I'm going with you," Kortner added.

"You?" Lawson showed his surprise.

"Any objections?"

Lawson slowly shook his head. Objections? After all, he had none. And three heads should be better than two.

Lawson spent a busy afternoon. He had an unsatisfactory interview with his chief. He got a visé for his passport (good for France, colonies and protectorates), he bought three tickets on the American Export, Diesel-powered flying freighter *Philadelphia* (taking off from New York the next morning). He bought a linen suit and a Panama hat; he gave notice at his apartment and asked that all mail be forwarded care of the American Consulate, Casablanca; he bought three railroad (day-coach) tickets to New York, and he packed two suitcases and a knapsack.

"Listen, my boy," the chief had said wearily. "I didn't think you'd be quitting us at a time like this. You know *I* can't give you authorization to do any investigating in Morocco: you have no proof that you'll find anything there. But you always have the right of resigning. I'll tell you what I'll do, though: I'll give you your vacation and a month's leave of absence. That'll give you seven weeks. If you return by then, you'll still have your job waiting for you. This wild goose chase of yours . . . ." He shook his head.

● "Just for Morocco?" the clerk at the French embassy on 16th street had asked him. "You might as well get your visé for France and all: it's just as cheap. I think you'll enjoy Morocco. I was stationed in Rabat for part of my military service. The fresh shrimp are good this time of year, and it won't be so dusty."

"They tell me it's the best time of year to see the country," the clerk told him at the shipping office on Connecticut avenue, "and the ships fly the southern route. It takes 3 days. The boats stop at five of the artificial islands. You wouldn't want a round-trip reduction? We could give you a special rate on that. Three one-way staterooms to Casablanca, then. Thank you, sir. We'll have to take ten per cent on your gold certificates. Sorry."

"Going to Florida, perhaps?" the haberdasher had asked him. "We can give you very good quality on this one, a hundred and ten dollars, silver; a week ago it would have been forty, but you know how things are. St. Augustine? Palm Beach? Look out that you don't run into a hurricane. Come in again."

"It sounds more like a South American city," the telephone girl had said. "Casablanca. Do you know what it means? It means 'white house.' I took two years of Spanish in high school."

"Three for New York?" the ticket-seller at the Union Station had queried. "Same price as before. Twenty-four dollars and twelve cents covers everything. Three, ten and seventy-five makes twenty-five dollars. Thank you."

"I didn't realize I had so much junk around here," Lawson had said to himself, as he started to fill his suitcases. "Might as well take this sweater, I guess. Should have bought some more toothpaste." He strapped a Colt .45 under his arm, thought better of it, and put it into one of the bags. "Don't need it yet," he thought. "A couple of books to read in the air. I can buy some magazines at the station. And what else? Won't need that bathrobe. Probably warm down there. Don't believe I've forgotten anything."

● Lawson had been unable to sleep at all on the last night out. Finally, at four in the morning, he rose, dressed, and went on the glass-enclosed deck. A cold, damp wind blew seaward, and Lawson shivered and pulled his chin farther down into the collar of his overcoat as he leaned his elbows on the rail and stared into the darkness toward the invisible Moroccan coastline, three hours away. All night he had been trying to reach some conclusion in his own mind concerning the fog. The flying cargo boat's wireless had brought news of it—along with the usual unrelated items that pass for news on shipboard—only the night before, and Lawson didn't know what to make of it.

Other world events carried by radio over the ocean were credible enough, considering the earth's present ferment. Chicago had been the scene of bloody street battles. A bomb explosion in Wall street had killed 78 persons. A terrific earthquake and tidal wave had hit Japan's island of Honshu, and Tokyo was badly shaken up. Hitler had proclaimed martial law in Germany. And then had come the staggering report of the Japanese disaster.

The first notice had it that the islands of Kyushu and Shikoku, with their 20,000,000 inhabitants, had sunk into the ocean, leaving no trace. This was subsequently denied, but the second report gave the information that fully half the population had perished: the islands had not actually disappeared under the China Sea, but had been hit by a series of terrible earthquakes that had scarred and eaten into them: the ground had been cracked open at intervals of a thousand meters, and millions fell to their death in the yawning fissures. The work of ascertaining the true damage had been difficult at first, because of the heavy, greenish fog that had shrouded everything.

This fog worried Lawson: a London radiogram had plotted its course, and, if it had kept on, it would have swept to the north of Casablanca. The London radiogram traced the withdrawal of the green mist that had hovered over Japan immediately before the cataclysm. The fog, from the 30th parallel north, had extended al-

most to Kyoto, had covered Kobe, Nagasaki and Osaka. After the series of earthquakes, it had fled westward before the wind, running above Chosen, over the ruins of Shanghai, Nanking and Hankow, westward into Tibet and the Himalaya mountains, over Peshawar and Lahore, over Afghanistan, south of Teheran in Persia, over Iraq, Amman, Transjordania and Palestine, into the Mediterranean and upper Egypt (covering Port Said but not Cairo), flowing over Tripoli, Tunis and Algeria, and finally spending itself in the Atlas mountains of Morocco; a strong wind-current had turned it south from Ceuta, and it was lost in the desert, so that it never reached Gibraltar.

Lawson remembered that the Mikado had been the first to defy the Lunar Consul. The fog, moreover, had been much too regular in its course, and much too speedy, to have been the product of nature. And the fog had been green. Nor had anyone seen it flying eastward, before the catastrophe. It had suddenly appeared at the dawn, engulfing the doomed islands. There had been no hint of it the day before. And, after the destruction had been completed, it ran into the west.

Would it be a sort of camouflage, Lawson wondered. If, as he thought, it was some doing of the Lunar Consul, would he be in need of camouflage? Fighting ships laid down smoke screens, airplanes could lose themselves in fog. Did the Menace need some such concealment to carry its plans to their execution? In that fog, as he understood the radiogram, there had been room enough for thousands of planes, which could fly unseen.

It seemed improbable that so many planes could fly through the night unnoticed; it seemed even more improbable that the number needed for such complete destruction could be built anywhere on earth without the world's knowledge. But, had there been anything probable in the whole thing?

Lawson pursed his lips and spat reflectively toward the waters that rose and fell below him. "But the fog ended in the Atlas," he said exultantly to himself. "We're on the right trail."

He was startled to hear a footstep behind him, and was surprised, when he turned, to discover that Madeleine Henderson was also on deck.

"Good morning," he said cheerfully. "What are you doing up at this hour?"

"I woke up a short while ago, and couldn't get back to sleep," the girl replied. She came to the rail and stared forward.

"How long is it before we are supposed to arrive at Casablanca?" she asked.

"About two hours and a half," Lawson said. "But it's too dark to see anything yet."

The girl looked in silence, straining her eyes to see land before her. After a moment, she turned to Lawson.

"I suppose you have the same ideas about the fog that I have." The sentence was given as a statement, not a question.

"About its ending up in Morocco, you mean?"

"What do you suppose it hid?" she asked seriously.

"I imagine the Japanese would be plenty glad to know," Lawson said. "I really haven't any idea. Airships, maybe, or airplanes. According to the reports, no one heard anything, though, and a fleet of planes, even with the new Diesels, should make enough noise to wake the dead."

Madeleine shuddered.

"Not the dead!" she said. "That's a terrible thought."

● Lawson remained silent. A creeping, cowardly fog, and, from it, death and annihilation. An unseen enemy, an enemy who promised no escape, gave no quarter, took no prisoners. Had the Lunar Consul, in his own manner, declared war?

"Why the Japs, do you suppose?" Lawson mused.

He turned to Madeleine.

"You said once that Nézan hated the Japanese. Why was it, do you know?"

"No," the girl replied. "I don't know exactly. He once accused Nimura, the Yokohama chemist, of having stolen an invention from him, but it doesn't seem

likely that that would be reason enough for his disliking the entire race."

"It doesn't," Lawson agreed. "But there is little that is reasonable about the whole affair. Japan, actually speaking, gave no more provocation than a dozen other nations. Nobody has actually begun to put the Menace's plan into effect, although there has been a lot of talk about it. So I still ask, why the Japanese?

"Why?" he repeated. "Unless Nézan were at the bottom of it? If Nézan, he must still be alive. And if he's still alive, then the others, too, perhaps . . . . Henderson, Vane, Manning, Berglied, Schulte."

Lawson didn't have much time to be surprised that Casablanca wasn't exactly what he thought a Moroccan city should be like. After having passed the customs, the three Americans threw themselves and their baggage into a taxicab and were hurried to the old municipal airport, south of the city. There were plenty of Arabs and donkeys, but no camels, and the streets were paved, much to Lawson's amazement. They caught the ten o'clock mail and passenger plane for Fez.

Kortner had managed to pick up a copy of *Le Petit Marocain*, the morning paper, and slowly translated parts of it to Lawson as he stared below him at the Moroccan landscape. In the foothills, Lawson watched the automobiles and busses, seen as insects, laboriously climb and loop over a road which spiralled, in its ascent, like loosed dental cream. "It takes five hours in a bus," Madeleine said once. "We'll make it in an hour and a half."

"This paper seems pleased about something," Kortner said. "But what it is, I can't quite figure out. It seems that the Monster, as they must call him here, didn't give the Casablanca municipal government any plans to revamp their fair city, as he evidently did to most of the other cities of the world. 'We Casablancans may well be proud,' this article says, 'that we have a city so well laid out that even the Monster can find nothing wrong with her.'"

"What's it all about?" Lawson asked, as he noticed the white oblongs that comprise the Tiflet way station.

"It seems that your Menace has been doing something actually constructive, for the first time," Kortner replied. "From what I can gather from this article, it seems that he has ordered the slums in all the cities of the world to be done away with. Not all the cities, either; it gives a list of them here. Lord, there are plenty of them. It looks to me as if France won't have a building left, from the names."

"Does it mention how he is to go about it?"

"Each of these cities' governments, it seems, has received a map of their town, giving the streets, boulevards, and houses. Parts marked in gold must be utterly destroyed, and rebuilt according to plan, which is enclosed. And the funny part is, that in each case, the map, with the new plans and all, was mailed and stamped in the city to whose government it was addressed."

"Well, good heavens!" Madeleine exclaimed. "Didn't he say anything about the Arab city in Casa?"

"No," Kortner said. "The article even goes so far as to express surprise that the Monster, who intends to repaint the earth in his own colors, has decided to leave the model city of Casablanca, with the ugly Arab houses, still standing on the other side of the Place de France."

Lawson gave up for the moment his idle attempt to try to find out whether the bird, flying below the plane, was a stork or a seagull.

"Say that again!" he commanded.

"Say what?" Kortner asked reasonably.

"About not destroying the Arab city."

"Why, the writer of the article seems surprised that the native quarters were to be preserved. I suppose the French would be glad enough to set fire to them."

"Or at least do a little fumigating," Madeleine put in.

Lawson nodded.

"Madeleine said that Nézan was always kind to his Arab help."

"What of it?" Kortner asked.

"Maybe nothing," said Lawson. "Maybe nothing."

CHAPTER IV

Disappeared

● The next morning, shortly after dawn, they set out from Sefrou on horseback, accompanied by an Arab guide. Except for knapsacks, they had left their luggage in Fez. Each was dressed for the trail.

Madeleine had explained that Nézan's observatory was some sixty kilometers west of Sefrou; 7000 feet above sea level; 2000 feet above the plateau on which Fez was situated. The sky was overcast when they left, and ten minutes later they had come to and passed the waterfall that was Sefrou's main attraction for tourists. Rain began to fall in torrents. Ahmed ben Larbi threw the hood of his *djellaba* over his turban, but did not change his dejected position in the saddle, as he gloomily allowed his steaming horse to plod forward into the downpour.

The sun came out shortly before noon, and by one o'clock, more than half way to the observatory, they were dry and comfortably warm. They stopped a short time to eat a bar of chocolate apiece, while their guide fed the horses. For the next hour they rode on through intermittent heavy showers.

"I begin to see why it's all so green around here," Lawson said. "I had an idea there was nothing but sand in this country."

"On the other side of the mountains," the girl said, "you can find all the sand you want. If you walk a couple of kilometers beyond Nézan's place you can see the Sahara, and you don't have to do much climbing, either."

"I'll have to take a look," Lawson said. "It must rain as much here as in Oregon, and I never saw so much clover in all my life."

Toward three o'clock they were stopped at the bottom of a hill by a sentry of the Foreign Legion. Lawson noticed by the figure "3" in the red triangle of his olive-drab collar that he belonged to the Third Army corps.

"We're going to Professor Nézan's observatory," Lawson said.

"I don't think you can," the sentry replied, with a strong German accent. "You'll have to see the lieutenant."

He accompanied them over the brow of the next hill, where the party came upon a small, open encampment. They dismounted, and as they entered a tent in the center of the clearing, the lieutenant put down the cards, with which he had been playing Skat with the first sergeant, and rose to face them.

"*Lieutenant Scholz de la Troisième Etrangère,*" he introduced himself. "*Que désirez-vous?*"

Lawson introduced himself and the others, and explained that they intended visiting Professor Nézan, of whom they were friends.

Lieutenant Scholz looked at him strangely.

"But impossible!" he exclaimed. "You are friends of Professor Nézan?" He considered a few moments, as Lawson nodded. "Well, perhaps . . . . we can see as to that. However, unless you are expected—are you expected?"

"No," Lawson said. "We couldn't get in touch with him."

"Ah," the lieutenant said. "I don't suppose you could. As a matter of fact, nobody has seen him for more than six months. Sergeant Tomacic here discovered last July that his buildings were deserted. We supposed that the Chleuh had got him. But we can't get back now to find out."

"No?" Lawson asked. "What's to prevent you?"

"We tried a week ago, after the fog—by the way, what's happened outside? I haven't seen a newspaper for seven days. You heard of the fog? The newspapers mentioned it?" When Lawson nodded again, the lieutenant continued, "It *was* green, wasn't it? We've never had so much trouble with the Arabs: they think it comes from Allah, the flag of Islam. Green fog!" He snorted. "Ridiculous! If I hadn't seen it myself, I would be the last on earth to believe it. Well, the fog disappeared up that way—" he gestured to the west—"and one of our planes smashed up in it.

"We found it (luckily the pilot wasn't badly injured, and he fired rockets), but

when we tried to go beyond it, to the west, we were unable to. It's strange; it's incredible, but we were absolutely unable. The air seemed quite clear, and we could see the professor's establishment not more than two or three kilometers away, but we could not penetrate to it. It was like pushing against a wall, and yet there was no wall there to be seen. It was very strange."

Lawson turned a puzzled face toward Kortner, and asked, in English:

"What in the world? What do you suppose that is, now?"

Kortner listened to the recurrent rainfall beating on the tent-top, before he answered, negligently:

"Maybe they do it with mirrors."

"You still want to go?" the lieutenant asked.

"Why, yes, certainly," Lawson said. "We'll want to see, anyway, and we couldn't get back to Sefrou before nightfall as it is. We'll push on; that is, with your permission."

"Surely, of course. I won't stop you. But you go, of course, at your own risk."

"Naturally," Lawson said. "But, if I may ask, what are you doing out here?"

"We have heard rumors of trouble among the Arabs," Lieutenant Scholz said evasively. "We are keeping our powder dry."

Their Arab guide spat contemptuously as they reappeared; muttered to himself.

"Forward!" Lawson cried.

About half an hour before nightfall, from the top of a hill, they saw a cluster of buildings in the distance, built in the shape of a rude square.

"That it?" Lawson asked.

● They had stopped their horses.

"I think so," Madeleine returned. "Although there is more to it than I remember."

When they came upon the cracked-up plane the lieutenant had told them about, Lawson thought of his veiled warning.

"Choufa," he said to the Arab. "Softly."

The guide grunted, and, some fifty paces beyond, reined in sharply. The horse stopped, quivering.

"Achnou?" Madeleine asked anxiously. "What's the matter?"

The Arab's horse, which had moved forward a step or so, shied to one side, and Ahmed gingerly put his hand forward. He withdrew it abruptly, then, fatalistically, stretched it out again. He seemed to rub something with the palm of his hand. There was no change apparent in his countenance: Ahmed ben Larbi ben Mohammed had seen many things in his life, and Allah was great. What now if He should place a wall so that none could see it?

"Kbir sarjem," Ahmed said, smiling.

"Ouachta!" Madeleine said angrily. "What are you talking about?"

"What's he say?" Kortner asked.

"He says there's a big window," Madeleine said.

The Arab looked hurt.

"I don't understand," he said glumly. *"Ma fhemt chi."*

Lawson vaulted from the saddle and started forward, but stopped with a sudden backward-leaning lurch as his forehead hit some resounding solid object.

Kortner laughed aloud.

"What's funny?" Lawson snapped, as he rubbed his head, and felt forward with his left hand. "What's so funny?"

"You were," Kortner chuckled. "Something bite you?"

Lawson gave an astonished grunt as his fingers were stopped by what might have been a sheet of glass; he could see no obstruction, but there most certainly was one. His tactile impressions were of smoothness, dampness, and a slight, surprising warmth. He felt up as high as he could reach, and down to his feet.

"By George!" he said. "Ahmed wasn't so far wrong at that."

"Kbir sarjem," Ahmed repeated morosely, looking up at the sound of his name.

The girl and Kortner descended from their horses and walked over to Lawson.

"What is it?" Madeleine asked.

"It's a big window, all right," Lawson replied. "Feel it."

The two reached out their hands and drew them back suspiciously when they en-

countered the moist barrier. They looked at each other in consternation.

"Well?" Lawson asked.

"It's there, all right," said Kortner.

"But how are we going to get through?" Madeleine asked desperately.

"Wait!" cried Lawson. "I have an idea. There may be a hole in this somewhere, and if so, it's up to us to find it. Kort, you stay here and see that the guide doesn't get away with the horses. Madeleine, you start off to the left; I'll go to the right. You keep your right hand against the 'window' and keep on walking until you find an opening. I'll do the same, going the other direction. Only go about half a mile, and then come back, because it'll be dark soon."

"All right," Madeleine aquiesced.

"Don't go too far," Lawson warned, as he started walking in the opposite direction, his left arm slightly forward and to one side, palm outward.

"I won't," the girl declared.

"I'll go with Madeleine," Kortner suggested. "It might be—"

Lawson frowned.

"You stay here, Kort," he said. "You stay here and watch the Arab."

A sullen look crossed Kortner's face, but he made no objection.

As Lawson walked forward, he turned every few steps to look at Madeleine's retreating figure, then to see the clustered houses from which the invisible wall cut them off. He thought he saw, in the gathering dusk, tiny figures moving about them, but he was too far away to make out whether the figures were man or beast. The overcast sky was lowering, and the wind stiffened: it looked like another rainstorm. Lawson turned to distinguish Kortner and was reassured to see him busily engaged in building a fire, while the Arab was having evident difficulty pitching the small tent.

The gloom thickened. A flash of lightning flickered across the sky, but so far distant that Lawson counted to 15 before he heard the first low rumble of thunder. After a moment, he thought he heard a shout.

"Well," Lawson said uncertainly to himself. He stopped, irresolute, when a few raindrops were blown into his face.

"After all," he said. "Might as well do this tomorrow."

He hesitated a moment more, then turned about to retrace his steps. Darkness had fallen very quickly. He could see little, and felt his way forward, using his right hand against Ahmed's "window" to guide him. He saw, from the direction of the fire in front of him, that he had been swinging in a slight arc, but he could not cut across: again the invisible stopped him, and he followed the wall. From the direction of Nézan's observatory, there came a slight glow, but there was not enough light to show more of the buildings than Lawson had already seen.

"The 'window' is solid enough, so far," Lawson mused. "Perhaps, there, on the other side . . . . Well, we'll see about that tomorrow."

Before he had returned to the spot he had started from, he noticed that Ahmed alone was crouched in front of the fire, brewing his mint tea in a small brass coffee-pot. Lawson strode to the tent.

"La," the Arab said. *"Macache.* The other has gone."

"Where?" Lawson spun around, facing the Arab. *"Fain?"*

"Hnak," Ahmed declared. "That way." He pointed in the direction Madeleine had taken.

Lawson peered into the darkness, but could see nothing. He remained still a moment, then was startled to hear running footsteps. Kortner, his face red and flushed from exertion, ran into the circle of firelight.

"Jerry!" he cried, panting. "She's gone!"

"Who?" Lawson asked, although he knew at once.

"Madeleine! She's gone!"

Lawson took Kortner by the shoulders, shook him.

"What do you mean, gone?" he asked savagely. "Where did she go?"

Kortner stammered for breath.

"I—I was gathering up a little wet wood for the fire," he said, "when I heard the thunder. I stopped to listen, and then I

heard, quite clearly but faintly, a scream to the left. That is, it sounded as if it came from the left. I knew it wasn't you, so I yelled in reply—"

"Yes," Lawson said. "I heard you."

"There was no answer, so I started off along the wall, running. I must have run for about five minutes, without seeing or hearing anything, when I stumbled and fell. I noticed something just ahead of me on the ground. I picked it up. Here it is."

He held out a blue ribbon toward Lawson.

"Lord!" Lawson said. "She had that in her hair."

Kortner nodded.

"Then I shouted again, listened, heard nothing, so I started back."

"Listen!" Lawson exclaimed. "Hear anything?"

Kortner looked apprehensively into the black night. There was a reverberating crash of thunder, and the rain began falling in earnest.

"No!" Kortner said. "Nothing. Did you?"

"I guess not," Lawson said. "Nerves, I guess. But we've got to do this, now. No sitting around a nice, warm fire, with Madeleine missing like that. Got your gun and flashlight?"

Kortner nodded.

"All right. I'll go to the left to see if I can find anything. You go to the right. The 'window,' I have reason to believe, makes a complete circle. We'll meet on the other side. If I find Madeleine, I'll fire three times—once, then twice in rapid succession. Ahmed, you stay here and keep that fire going. Kort, if you happen to stumble across an opening, mark it some way, and we'll try to get through later. First, though, we have to try to find Madeleine. On your way."

No sooner had he finished speaking than he pulled his hat down over his eyes, partly to shield them from the driving rain, and walked hurriedly to the left, away from the fire. Kortner shrugged his shoulders, buttoned his jacket, and started to the right.

Lawson's mind was in a turmoil as he strode through the rain, feeling his way in the darkness by the slight warmth to his right. Danger was on the other side of the window. Had Madeleine found an opening, and bravely walked in, leaving her ribbon to mark the spot? Kortner had found no opening. If there had been one, it was cut off, closed from the inside.

Every now and then, Lawson stopped to listen, and heard only the whistling wind and the rush of falling waters. He was in almost complete darkness, but, for some reason, as long as the "window" was between him and the huddled structures in its center, he felt no fear. Any evil, he felt, would come from within, not from without.

Nézan's buildings were barely visible, and were seen clearly only when an occasional lightning flash disclosed them, white and sinister, in the surrounding, barren landscape. At one such flash, Lawson had the uneasy impression that there was an upright figure, perhaps a hundred feet within the window's circle; an upright figure distorted by the falling rain, that had stopped, stockstill, and was staring at him. Lawson could distinguish nothing in the darkness that followed, and walked sturdily on through the mud. The rain was slowly changing to a stinging, icy sleet, and Lawson felt sodden and miserable. Only the forlorn hope of finding Madeleine Henderson kept him plowing forward through the raging elements.

Lawson stumbled on through the dismal night. After more than an hour of walking, during which time he saw nothing that helped him in his quest, the wind died down and the rain and sleet stopped abruptly. Faintly, through the invisible "window," he could see Ahmed's fire, a tiny speck of light to the right of the observatory, although the buildings themselves were no closer, and looked much the same from the rear as from the front. The sky was still clouded, and no light broke through.

He noticed Kortner and the prowling figure on the other side of the "window" at almost the same time, and then saw, like a shadow, another bulky form trailing his friend from within the closed circle. The two figures, scarcely seen against the dark background, stopped as they approached

each other. They seemed oddly huge and ungainly, but there had been method in their stalking. Unseen, they evidently had been following for some time. As Kortner continued to walk toward Lawson, one of the figures turned and bounded from sight. The other remained, a great, ungainly blot in the night; silent, unmoving.

"No trace?" Lawson asked eagerly.

"None," Kortner responded. "You?"

"No, nothing."

Lawson pointed.

"What do you suppose it is?"

Kortner shivered, did not turn to look.

"*I* don't know," he said. "I felt all the way that I was being followed, but I couldn't make anything of it."

"A big brute, whatever it is," Lawson said, peering into the shadows.

The two Americans returned to their camp. Both said little, each busy with his own thoughts. Once Kortner said, "I don't like it," but failed to amplify his statement. And once Lawson muttered, "It was a hell of an idea, sending Madeleine off by herself," but Kortner didn't reproach him.

CHAPTER V

Inside the Window

● The next morning, after a night of fitful sleep and vaguely horrible nightmares, Lawson returned with Kortner to the spot where he had found Madeleine's hair ribbon. If there had been a struggle, the rain had washed away all trace of it. Here and there were small puddles of water, puddles that might have been formed from the girl's footprints, but there was nothing to show either that she had attempted flight or been overcome by any beast, human or inhuman. Lawson wandered disconsolately away from the "window," but here, even the grass did not seem to have been trodden down. Kortner called to him.

"Come here, Jerry, and take a look."

Lawson returned to the barrier, and looked through it in the direction Kortner was pointing. There, not more than two yards inward, was the imprint of an immense, naked foot. Whatever being had pressed that foot to earth must have been very heavy, Lawson thought, because of the depth it had sunk into the soft, red clay. Or—and here a terrible thought came to him—the creature that had left the footprint had been carrying something, or somebody. Lawson shuddered.

"It might have been one of those we saw last night," he suggested, with an inward tremor.

"God forbid!" Kortner said piously. "Although they looked as if they could do it easily enough."

"But how in the name of the Lunar Consul could she get through the 'window'?" Lawson asked tensely. "Even if she found an opening, you'd think she'd have sense enough to wait until we came along."

"Well," Kortner said. "Maybe she was pulled through. She screamed, you know, or someone screamed. She certainly didn't go willingly."

"No," Lawson concurred. "I don't suppose she did. But how can we get through to find her? How can we get through ourselves?"

He felt the barrier with his hands, but there was no break apparent; no opening in it. He hammered at it with his fists, and made no impression upon it.

"Shatterproof," Kortner suggested.

Angrily, Lawson drew his automatic and fired once. Immediately afterward, he was glad that he was using lead-nosed bullets, as the projectiles flattened themselves in midair and dropped to the ground in front of him. Steel might have ricocheted, wounded him.

"Well," Lawson stared dejectedly. "Nothing to it, I guess, but sit and wait."

"For what?" Kortner asked.

"For what!" Lawson repeated. "Why, to wait for the breaks, I guess. This thing has me stumped, I'll say that for it. I can't think of anything to cope with it. I've never heard of anything resembling it. And the hell of it all is, that we've almost reached our first objective. There can't be any doubt that the Menace has his headquarters, or at least a depot, in Nézan's place. Once inside, we might do something. As it is, the Menace might as well be on the moon; we have no way of getting to him. And he's

got Madeleine, too. I begin to see one or two things I didn't see before."

"As for instance?"

"Well, for instance. The airplane crashed, not because the pilot lost his bearings in the fog, but because he tipped up against friend Menace's 'window,' and he wasn't killed outright, for he barely grazed it. And Scholz' foreign legion couldn't get through, because they couldn't get through, of course. The 'window' must be strong enough to stop a herd of stampeding elephants. Further, the 'window' must be a comparatively new development, or else the French government would have heard about it."

For half the morning, Lawson gathered stones of all sizes and shapes, which he heaped by his knapsack, and he spent the rest of the morning throwing rocks at the "window." No matter how high he threw, nothing came down on the other side; every stone bounced back. "Probably goes up a mile," he said. The barrier seemed slightly rounded, as if it extended like an inverted cup over the buildings it protected.

"If it wasn't so serious, it would be ridiculous," Kortner remarked, as Lawson watched the trajectory of a pebble he threw high in the air. "Imagine someone having sense enough to tell various cities to clean out their slums, and having the cities object to it at all. You'd think that sort of stuff wouldn't be necessary; that slums would have been cleared out long since, because people wanted to get rid of them. But no, we had to wait for the Lunar Consul to make us do something about it. I think it's a good idea, myself."

"Sure it's a good idea," Lawson said. "That's the trouble. If the Consul aimed only at destruction, wanted to populate the earth with moon people, or something of that sort, everybody would be up in arms against him. This way, he has a lot of people with him, who might actually help him with his plans. Why, you might even go—"

Lawson, his right arm drawn back to throw another stone, stopped in mid-sentence; began again, "You might even—" then dropped the stone and stared hard into the clearing beyond the "window."

"What's up?" Kortner asked.

Lawson continued to stare; did not answer. For, from the square of white houses ahead of him, there was rising into the air, something that from a distance looked like a peculiarly flattened, golden tomato. Either it had been hidden behind the buildings, or it had raised itself out of the ground, for Lawson had not seen it before. It must have been almost sixty feet in diameter, and perhaps twenty feet high, and it seemed to rise by a process of levitation, without using any known force: there were no whirling helices to indicate propellers, no helicopter vanes, no blasts of flaming gas as from a rocket. The golden tomato rose slowly, deliberately, into the sunlight, and then hovered, as if waiting.

"Quick!" Lawson said. "Your camera!"

Kortner dived hurriedly into the tent, rummaged hastily in his knapsack.

Lawson groaned.

"Too late, I guess," he said. "But hurry anyway."

● By the time Kortner ran out again, the mysterious aircraft was hidden in a haze of greenish mist, which rolled out in all directions with express-train speed. In less than two minutes, the fog had reached the invisible "window." There it stopped for a moment, as it swirled in sluggish spirals against it, and then it broke through the barrier and folded the two men in its warm, clammy embrace.

Strangely, Lawson thought, he felt no evil effects: the fog, then, was not lethal. The fog had not billowed or faltered; it was much too regular for that. As it passed over them and engulfed them, they were momentarily unable to see, because of the quick blotting out of the sun's fiery rays, and everything appeared to them as in the thickest of natural, seaborne fogs, except that its greenness threw a ghastly, livid glow on their faces. Objects at a distance were indistinct, unreal. The fog from within had a clammy appearance, but it seemingly carried no moisture: it was taste-

less and odorless, and possessed a slight heat of its own.

Lawson made a sudden resolution. Running into the tent, he shouted:

"Kort, grab this knapsack and run for the 'window!' I'll take mine. They must have raised it to let the fog out. Quick! Ahmed, *ashi, ashi! Fissah!*"

Stumbling over the uneven tufts of grass, Lawson and Kortner ran in the direction of the barrier. Ahmed, his saturnine countenance lighting for a moment at the unexpected excitement, gave a high-pitched Arab scream, leapt onto the back of an unsaddled horse, and spurted past the two Americans. When they were well within the "window's" boundary, Lawson called a halt. Kortner, puffing, sat down on his knapsack.

"We're playing in luck," Lawson said breathlessly. "We might have had to wait months for this to happen."

"Yeah," Kortner said sarcastically. "We were probably better off outside."

"Maybe, maybe," Lawson said. "I realize we don't know what we're up against. But when I saw that fog break through, I knew we had our chance; nothing so intangible as fog could actually break through the 'window,' so I knew that it had been lifted, somehow. And here we are."

He looked about him, warily, but the fog was still too thick to make out anything. He felt for his automatic.

"I wouldn't be wanting to run into any of those little strangers," he said.

As he spoke, the fog rushed away beyond them. Lawson and Kortner watched it silently until, as it dwindled from a cloud that covered half the horizon to a pin-prick of green in the blueness of the sky, it disappeared altogether.

"Three to one we can't get out," Lawson offered. He gestured in the direction of their camp.

"No takers," Kortner responded.

Casting a glance over his shoulder, to make sure that no one from Nézan's observatory was behind him, Lawson walked away. When he came to the former location of the "window," he walked slowly, hands outstretched, like a man in a dark room. He stopped with an abruptness that left no doubt in Kortner's mind that the "window" was once again intact. Lawson turned around with a smile.

"Ha," he said, with a certain grim gleefulness in his tone. "We'll be calling on Nézan now, whether we want to or not."

It seemed incredible to him, as he stood there in the warm sunlight, that, less than two miles from him, there dwelt a Menace to the peace of the world. It was hard, in the quiet of nature around him, to recapture his feeling of tautness and baffiement of the night before, when, in a frenzy, he had begun his hunt for the girl.

"Well," he said cheerfully, when he had returned to Kortner. "Nézan's place, next stop." He turned to the Arab.

"Kbir sarjem bezzef hnak," he said, grinning.

"Insh'Allah!" Ahmed returned, with the righteous smile of the true believer.

"Now get this straight," Lawson said to Kortner as they approached the outer buildings ahead of them. Nobody, in the fifteen minutes they had been walking, had challenged them; in fact, they had seen nothing whatever to arouse their suspicions. That, in itself, they thought, was suspicious enough.

"Now let's get this straight," Lawson said. "We're going to tell the truth as far as we can. We were going with Madeleine Henderson to call on Professor Nézan. She remembered him as a friend, and we wanted to find a quiet retreat, where we could hide and wait until the world recovers from whatever is going to happen to it. If we're asked for news from outside, we'll give all we know, honestly. We were unable to go farther last night, because of the barrier. This morning we were surprised by the fog—"

"We sure were," Kortner said.

"—and we wandered inside the 'window,' so that, even if we had wanted to, we couldn't have gotten out. Of course, we didn't want to. We thought the best thing to do would be to see Nézan himself. If he objects, we will leave, of course. Last night, Miss Henderson disappeared: we think she must be within the radius of the 'win-

dow,' and does anybody know where she is, or has anybody seen her?

"The main thing is to tell the truth whenever we can, as we certainly have been watched, and they can probably check up on anything we say or have done. But, until we understand the lay of the land, there would be no point in telling our fundamental reason for coming here. As a matter of fact, we even doubt that there is such a thing as the Lunar Consul, and don't suspect that his headquarters are here. Our only outright lie will be only a half-lie, at that: we did set out to see Nézan. Any objections?"

"It sounds all right," Kortner said dubiously. "I guess we can explain away anything we might be carrying with us. That is, if we get a chance to do any explaining at all, which isn't likely."

"Well, it's surely nothing to get overconfident about," Lawson said. "We'll have to watch our step, or we'll put our foot in it. But then, too, the Consul seems humane enough, in a manner of speaking. Well, we'll see."

Lawson didn't understand the danger they were in, but he mentally shrugged his shoulders at it. He was not foolhardy—that he knew by experience—but, for him, the simplest solution had been the direct solution. He had neither the habit nor the temperament for beating around the bush: he sought the whirlwind's center. Danger, there, revolved swiftly all around him, but the answer was within. And yet, a direct, frontal attack was not feasible; and guile had to be used to get at the center of things. The use of guile, he knew, was in this case the simplest and most direct way to a solution.

"Strange," he muttered, as they halted by mutual consent a hundred yards from the squat buildings in front of them. There had been no sound, no movement from within, and the day was unnaturally quiet. Within the confines of the "window" there was no wind, and therefore, although the February sun was not uncomfortably hot, they found that they were dressed too warmly.

"Funny," he said after a moment. "You'd think something would be going on." He strained his ears. Silence. "Well, 'Nothing ventured . . . .'"

As they approached the houses, Lawson saw that they were built in the prevailing Moroccan fashion. Immensely solid, with walls probably four feet thick to withstand the summer heat, they were made of rocks and mortar, and covered with a coat of whitewash.

All the buildings were low, although higher than one story. Lawson had been amused, in Fez, when he found that the ceiling of his room was too high to be reached, even if he stood on the table with a broom, to sweep away a spider web, so that he figured that here, too, the ceilings were high. There were three cubical structures, making a square, half shut off on the fourth side by the observatory; a building slightly taller than the others, but only about half as long. The buildings were not joined, and were separated at the corners by some thirty feet of tufted clover.

They walked between the buildings into the square, then stopped to look around them. There were two large doorways at each end of the three oblong houses: all were open. An Arab, in red pants, white jacket, and fez, walked from one of them, and Lawson immediately hailed him. He beckoned; it struck him even then as odd that the sign language he used was the exact opposite of his own: to make the Arab approach he motioned him away. The Arab answered in Chleuh, a dialect with which Lawson was entirely unfamiliar.

"Ask him where we can find Professor Nézan," he directed Ahmed.

Ahmed broke into a guttural stream of speech, and was answered by the native.

"The Professor is ill," Ahmed reported. "In that house." He pointed to the observatory.

"Has he seen a girl?" Lawson asked.

Ahmed translated the question, and the other Arab nodded and spoke again.

"Chafha," Ahmed reported. *"Ed-dakhel dar hnak."*

Lawson was relieved: the Arab had seen her, and she was now in "that house," the observatory.

"We'll go calling," Lawson decided.

As he approached the door of the observatory to knock, he felt his heart pounding heavily against his ribs. If his theory were correct, he was going to see the Menace, for the first and perhaps the last time. He swallowed a mouthful of saliva that seemed to be choking him, and rapped on the door.

There was no answer for a moment, and Lawson was on the point of knocking again, when the door swung rapidly open. Although well-lighted inside, it seemed dark and chilly compared with the outside glare. Lawson noticed that the walls were bare and white, and then suppressed an exclamation of confusion. Coming out of the door were two persons: Madeleine Henderson and a tall, well-proportioned, older man. They both seemed equally surprised.

"Mr. Lawson!" the girl cried. "How did you get in here?"

While Lawson, in almost the same breath, said, "Miss Henderson! You're safe, then."

They smiled, both pleased to see each other, before the girl said, "Mr. Lawson, I'd like to have you meet my father, Professor Henderson."

Lawson checked the question he was going to ask, and said:

"I'm very pleased to meet you, sir."

"Not at all, not at all." Henderson appeared to be a bit confused, and he ruffled his white hair before he continued, politely.

"I appreciate all you were able to do for my daughter, and for bringing her safely to me. I haven't had much of a chance to talk with her yet; if you would be so kind as to excuse us—"

"Why, certainly," Lawson said. He was experiencing a sense of surprise himself. "But—". He hesitated, at a loss for words. "Where could I find Professor Nézan, could you tell me?" He had wanted to ask, "Didn't you know that your daughter had been here since early last evening?" but he held his tongue. That was something he could find out about later.

"Nézan?" The professor looked at him absent-mindedly. "Why do you want to see Nézan? He's very sick. He shouldn't be wanting to see anyone."

"Well . . . . " Lawson hesitated again. How much would it be safe to tell Henderson? The safest thing, of course, would be to tell nothing. "Well, do you think it would be all right for us to stay here?"

Henderson looked vaguely irritated.

"Why, of course, of course. Why not? Stay as long as you like . . . . as long as you like."

"Well, this *is* Nézan's place, isn't it?" Lawson asked, nonplussed. "He wouldn't care, would he? I mean, it will be all right with him?"

Henderson laughed grimly.

"Nézan won't care, I can assure you of that. He would be only too pleased to extend to you personally, our poor hospitality."

"Thank you, sir."

CHAPTER VI

The Missing Scientists

● Lawson was about to call to Kortner, who had seated himself in the shade next to one of the buildings, when he noticed an alarming change come over the professor's face. The eyes, which had been clear, if somewhat remote, now filmed over, and Henderson swayed slightly on his feet. The younger man sprang to his side, only to be brushed away angrily.

"Quite all right," Henderson said. "Temporary."

He turned to his daughter.

"You'll have to excuse me. I must show this young man to the Consul's room."

"I beg your pardon?" Lawson asked hastily. Had he heard aright? "Whom did you say you were going to take me to see?"

The professor lowered his voice a trifle.

"Surely, if you've come from the Outside, you have heard of the Lunar Consul?" His glance was a queer combination of fear and indifference. "We call him the Invisible Omnipotence here. You'll have an opportunity to talk with him, at once."

Standing though he was in the warm daylight, Lawson felt a chill invade his spine. He hadn't bargained to meet the

Consul so soon, nor under such circumstances. Because, if the Consul knew of his presence, he might also know of his reason for coming. It was too soon. He had no plan. But he was helpless to disobey. He looked, in rueful dismay, at Madeleine. She smiled, nodded encouragement.

"All right," Lawson said resolutely. "If I must, I must."

The professor led the way into the cool corridor. They passed several knobless doors, then stopped before one seemingly made of gold: engraved on it was a green disc, the moon at full.

"Here you are," Henderson said, and started to walk away.

"Thank you," said Lawson.

He looked at the door, thought absurdly to himself that the moon was made of green cheese, and knocked.

The door swung open with a slight creaking sound. Lawson took a deep breath and entered the room.

At the moment, Lawson would have been unable to tell what he expected to see. Later, he said, "I thought there might be a brain in a jar, or something. But nobody warned me of what the room actually held." As a matter of fact, Lawson saw nothing, which surprised him more than anything else. The room was quite bare. It was entirely square, covered with white enamel or lacquer, and its dimensions were about twenty feet by twenty feet, from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. There was one large window, which was opaque, but all the bright light in the room did not seem to come from it: there was a diffused light coming from every direction, so that the room was shadowless.

Lawson cleared his throat nervously. Experiences new to him were piling up too rapidly to sort them out. His general feeling was one of perplexity, not unmixed with the fear of the unknown.

"Pray, be seated," a voice said. The sound seemed to come from somewhere above and facing him, but Lawson saw nothing in the room. It was as bare as before. The voice was oddly metallic, and familiar.

"But where?" he asked involuntarily, as it struck him that the voice was the same that the Consul had used in his first broadcast; the broadcast Madeleine and he had heard in Washington almost a week before. He looked around, helplessly, almost convinced that a chair would appear miraculously out of the void, would materialize from the air around him.

"To your left," the voice said. "Two paces. Now. Sit down!"

Lawson did so, and felt immensely relieved to feel a stool beneath him. He saw none, but as he was on the verge of examining what he was sitting on, the voice spoke again.

"Mr. Lawson, I have asked you to come to see me. You came from Washington with Madeleine Henderson and Felix Kortner to find the Lunar Consul. You have found him. And before I ask you what you want to do with him, in fairness to yourself, I must tell you that I can read your inarticulate thoughts as easily as you can hear my voice. I see that your thoughts are, at present, all confusion. I see, further, that you have no actual plan with which to rout me. And, Mr. Lawson, you have taught me something. 'What is it' you ask?" (Lawson started. He had intended asking that very question.)

"You came within my force-wall during the space of the few seconds I was compelled to lift it. That, Mr. Lawson, is the last mistake of the kind I shall make. Hereafter, when I send out my space cruiser, I shall use an entirely different principle."

The voice stopped abruptly, and Lawson twisted uneasily in his chair until it resumed:

"Mr. Lawson, you are my prisoner. I could allow you to leave, but I don't wish the world to know of my whereabouts, just yet, and, therefore, I will see that you stay within my force-wall. It is barely conceivable that there might be found something to counteract it, and I see no reason for taking that chance.

"You will have freedom of action, within certain defined limits. You cannot, of course, go beyond the force-wall. You may not enter any of the laboratories, unless I

receive assurance from you that you will do nothing to hinder my work, which I see you are unwilling to do at the present time. Of some of the others, I have made unwilling accomplices, because I can make use of their specialized knowledge. Of you —later, perhaps—I could make an aerial observer.

"But for the time being, you may consider yourself an honored guest. According to the international law of war, I will see that you are fed, that you shall receive clothing when you need it.

"You have, I see, an incomplete and erroneous idea concerning what I am going to do for world betterment. I hope that, in the future, you will come to thank me for the doing of what must appear to you to be a thankless task; the remodelling of the world along civilized and scientific lines. Of the men with whom I have come in contact here, there are only two or three who have not whole-heartedly fallen in with me. The world is unable to care for itself. I will care for it, nurture it, bring it to its rightful heritage of peace and well-being. For the good of Mankind."

The voice stopped with an evident finality that caused Lawson to look once more around him for the apparatus that might have shut it off. The room was unchanged, and the door swung open. Lawson got unsteadily to his feet, feeling somehow as though he had been drugged, and walked uncertainly to the door. When he walked out, it closed behind him.

● "Lord!" Lawson said to Kortner, as he mopped his perspiring brow with a handkerchief. "I never want to go through *that* again. You can't *see* the man, I tell you, and you can't tell where he is. He might not be there at all, for all I know. 'For the good of Mankind' he ended. And that voice of his! There's nothing human about it, sure enough."

Kortner looked almost as perturbed as Lawson himself.

"You say he can read your thoughts?"

"There's no doubt about it. He comes out and says that I taught him something. That was strange enough, you must admit, and the first thing that popped into my head was to ask him what it was I had taught him. Well, he answered the question before I asked it. Believe me, you can't sneak up behind a guy like that. And you wouldn't know you were behind him, anyway. It gives me the creeps."

He stared around him. For all he knew, the Invisible Omnipotence was listening to him as he spoke.

"Listen, Kort. You'll be called in to see him soon yourself, probably. I want you to check up on what I've told you."

"Sure," Kortner said, not entirely pleased at the prospect. "Sure. You bet."

"And another thing," Lawson said. "Kort, you know something about physics. Do you think it would be possible to have an intelligent entity with no body, no flesh and blood? You know what I mean."

"A mind with no corporeal substance? Well, it seems far-fetched, of course," Kortner said cautiously. "Nobody has ever heard of one. Scientifically speaking, I don't think it's possible."

"You'll change your mind when you meet my friend the Consul," Lawson said.

His feeling of helplessness was no easy matter to explain. What he had experienced was new and baffling: some things had been preternaturally clear, as in a fever; others were vague and blurred. When he had looked at the "window," the walls were hazy. At the time, he had been unable to think clearly of it, and now, if anything, he was even more confused.

Lunchtime found Lawson seated at a long table, with ten others. A small, golden robot was perched at one end; his head was cubed and many-sided, and he had two eyes and a mouth, but lacked a nose. His eyes were lidless, and glared straight ahead, as if made of glass. From the head, the body dwindled away into three stiff legs of flexible metal, and there were no arms. The meal of concentrated food was mechanically brought to each place by a revolving belt along each side of the table.

Lawson, Kortner, and the girl were evidently the only ones to notice the robot, as the others were used to its presence. Madeleine had met those who were at the table,

but Lawson had to be introduced to the rest; he smiled at Henderson, and met Berglied, the Chicago biochemist, at one time Henderson's teacher, a small, self-effacing man, quiet and fearful; Schulte, who was partially bald and redheaded, quite fat and completely at home; Manning, tall and stoop-shouldered, with a far-away look in his eye and a sallow, sardonic face; Hermann, formerly of the University of Munich, who spoke a rapid and unprecise English, and who bellowed his greeting so that the foundations of the house seemed to shake; Guglielmo, an Italian famous for his work in wireless waves, who spoke little, but whose sharp, burning eyes took everything in; Hammersmith, younger than the rest, who looked and was dressed more like a mining engineer than a specialist in the structure and diseases of the brain; and Alekhine, a Russian expert in chemical warfare, whose sharp-featured face had a strong Jewish cast, and who also seemed totally indifferent to his surroundings. There were two vacant places.

"Ha!" Hermann, the Bavarian, cried. "How does one suppose our good friend, the Herr Professor Vane, is progressing? Does one suppose that our fine *Nebel*—what you say?—fog kept those thousands of *verdammte* French airplanes from his ship?" He addressed the robot at the table's end. "Has one news from him? Have we destroyed La Villette, what long since destroyed should have been?"

Lawson gasped as the robot answered in the metallic voice he was fast becoming accustomed to hear, but the rest of the table took it as a matter of course, and did not stop eating.

"For the good of Mankind! You will all be glad to hear that our mission has been accomplished. The slums of the La Villette section of Paris were utterly destroyed 25 minutes ago, and our work of reconstruction there may now begin. Because of an accident in transmitting our warning to the French government, there were a few casualties. Otherwise our plan has been carried out entirely as previously declared. For the good of Mankind."

"Jove!" Hammersmith, who was seated at Lawson's left, muttered under his breath. "A few casualties! That must mean at least ten thousand dead, your Omnipotence."

"How do you mean?" Lawson asked.

Hammersmith looked at him quickly, seemed to size him up, then spoke.

"Why, your friend whatchamacallum—Kortney is it?—told us that we had murdered half of Japan. Right?"

"Yes."

"The Consul told us that a few thousand were unfortunately killed." Hammersmith shot an appraising glance at him.

"Oh." Lawson was silent.

"Propaganda at the source, what?" Hammersmith continued. He looked at the robot, lowered his voice. "Some of us are not entirely in sympathy with his Omnipotence's manner of reaching a possibly satisfactory ending."

"You?" Lawson asked.

"Quite," Hammersmith replied. "This radish is delicious, don't you think?"

Lawson smiled. If Hammersmith, who seemed a pleasant chap, were unafraid in the midst of the Consul's horrors, then there probably were others. But, he thought, if the Consul could afford to allow his enemies the comparative freedom of his headquarters, he must feel safe indeed.

Or, perhaps, if Hammersmith was simply trying him out by pretending to oppose the Consul, he would worm from Lawson whatever future plan he might work out. Lawson at least had one consolation. If that were true, then the Consul knew him already for an enemy. He had never pretended a sympathy for him he did not feel.

● "I'm with you," Lawson said. After all, he had nothing to lose by telling Hammersmith what the Menace already knew. "I'm an enemy of the Consul, and the Consul knows it."

Hammersmith laughed wholeheartedly.

"Of course he knows it," he said. "You've had your first interview with him, haven't you? He knows what I think of his methods, too. Actually, you'd think he had nothing to fear. I've even told that loud-

speaker of his" (he gestured toward the silent robot) "that allowing his enemies to come into his camp will one day lead to his destruction. Anyone could see that is common sense. But the Consul? Not he. He has use for me, and he'll find a use for you. He would be a hard man to tackle, y'know."

"I believe it," Lawson said. "So far, I must say I have no idea how to go about it. But there must be a way."

Hammersmith nodded appreciatively.

"That's what I try to tell him," he said. "I admire him, in a way, because of his single-mindedness. But he knows that I'd be the first to stab him in the back if I had the chance." He waved his knife luxuriously over his plate.

Berglied, sitting on the other side of Hammersmith, shuddered at his gesture.

"But what I don't see," Lawson objected, "is how your Consul can make you work for him if you're unwilling, as you say you are."

"Unwilling!" Berglied exclaimed angrily, looking at the same time apprehensively at the robot. "We're all unwilling, at times. Hammersmith here is a Consular ally, as far as willingness is concerned. Only that renegade Vane is more willing."

Hammersmith laughed comfortably.

"The power of the mind is stupendous," he remarked. "I've done some work on brains in my time, but I'd like to have the Consul's to dissect when I finally destroy him. We're like babies when he's around. Resist him? Rather! I tried that myself when I first was brought here. I pitted my mind against his. There wasn't even a struggle. Jove, it was a magnificent experience! When the Consul tells one to do his bidding, his bidding is done. Unwilling, indeed!"

Berglied nodded his dejected head.

"That's the way it was," he said. "He told me, right off, that I was to work with Alekhine in making a harmless, heavy fog, and he showed us how to begin. I tried to bungle, just once. I was out of my head for a week. My brain was incapable of functioning, except in the direction he wanted it to function. It was terrifying."

"I see," Lawson said, although he didn't. He looked at the other diners at the table. Might the Consul be one of them? He might be present, and still speak through his robot with the aid of a phonograph record previously prepared. All seemed unperturbed, at ease, and they ate their fare as if they had done nothing all their lives but work for an intangible monster.

Henderson, nodding and smiling at his daughter's remarks; Schulte, talking with the engrossed Hermann, intent on his mashed potatoes and sausage; Guglielmo, eating silently and fastidiously, a faint look of contempt on his swarthy, handsome face; Manning, his eyes on the wall, only half-listening to the outpourings of Alekhine, the Russian. Missing, were Vane, who had evidently taken the sky-cruiser to Paris, and Nézan, who was ill.

"By the way," Lawson asked. "How is Nézan, do you know?"

"He's very ill, poor chap," Hammersmith said. "He came to Morocco long ago, and was bitten by too many mosquitoes. He has had several malarial attacks since I've been here. The paludism, as the French call it, isn't serious when one is young, but it grows worse the older one gets."

"I've never met him," Lawson said. "What kind of a person is he?"

"Never met him?" Hammersmith asked. "Why, I can tell you you've missed something. A quite remarkable fellow. I used to have the impression that he was the Consul, and was just pulling our leg with all this music-hall invisibility. When you meet him you'll understand why. He's a quiet chap, reserved and all that, but you can just see the power in him. When he looks at you out of those dark eyes of his, you *know* he's seeing right through you, reading your every thought. I thought, for once, the Consul must have had a struggle subduing him."

CHAPTER VII

The Story of Destruction

● Indeed? Lawson thought. He must see this Nézan. So far as he could tell at present, Nézan might as well be the Consul as any one else. But a sick man, stricken

with a recurrent malaria, wouldn't be likely to be putting into effect a plan for improving the world. Or would he?

"Is he *really* sick, do you think?" Lawson asked.

Hammersmith looked at him uncomprehendingly for a moment.

"Jove!" he said. "I see what you mean! You mean he may be doing us in again? While we think he's sick abed, he's really hatching out some new devilment." His eyes sparkled. "Though why should he want to do it, old fellow? Tell me that."

"Why," Lawson began uncertainly. "Why, for that matter, should he want to do anything?"

"That's just it!" Hammersmith said enthusiastically. "Answer that question and you have him, if you can find him."

Lawson swore softly under his breath.

"I've heard of easier jobs," he said, "than trying to hogtie an invisible entity."

"No doubt," Hammersmith agreed.

As the scientists drifted from the table, one by one and in pairs, Lawson dipped into a peculiarly sweet dessert, and turned again to Hammersmith.

"There are a hundred thousand things I'd like to know," he said. "Tell me, where do you get your food?"

"We make it," Hammersmith said, triumphantly.

"Actually?"

"Rather. We make synthetic foods quite easily, although I must admit that some *are* a bit tasteless without our artificial condiments."

He smiled, excused himself, and left the dining room. Lawson watched him go, pushed his plate into the slot over a conveyor belt Hammersmith had pointed out to him, in the center of the table, and walked out into the sunshine.

"Whew!" Lawson said. Until his talk with Hammersmith, he had failed fully to realize the tremendous odds against him. Here was no little temporary camp, unprepared to stand a siege, the sudden whim of some scientifically-mad outcast. Nézan's group of buildings could not be starved, could not even be directly attacked. "And here I am, right in the thick of it," Lawson mused.

He saw Madeleine Henderson go as far as the observatory door with her father, who left her there. She returned toward the building in Lawson's direction, and approached him.

"Well," she said happily. "I'm glad to have found father, and that he's feeling well."

"Yes," Lawson agreed. "I suppose you are." He looked gloomily at her radiant face. "But now that we're here, how are we going to get out?"

She looked at him quizzically.

"Surely you don't want to get out until you've overcome the Consul?"

"No," Lawson said hurriedly. "No." Why was it that the girl's simplest question always made him feel sort of sheepish?

"We'll find a way," Madeleine said confidently.

Lawson wasn't so sure, and changed the subject abruptly.

"Say, what happened to you last night?"

"Oh!" A puckered frown appeared on the girl's face.

Lawson waited.

"I can't tell you," the girl said finally.

"Why not?" Lawson asked. His tone showed considerable surprise.

"Oh, I don't mean I wouldn't if I could. But I have no idea what happened. I was walking along by the 'window' when it started to rain, and I stopped to lean against it for a moment. Then, all of a sudden, I felt as if I were falling, but, before I reached the ground or was able to right myself, something caught me, and I found myself looking into the most terrible pair of eyes I've ever seen. They were red and awfully piggish; so small and staring. Then I guess I must have fainted, because I don't remember anything until this morning, when I awoke in my room in that building over there."

"You remember nothing of how you got there?"

"Absolutely nothing."

"When did you first see your father?"

"This morning. He came in shortly after I woke up, asked me if I was all right, and

then left again. He said he was sorry he hadn't been able to come sooner, but that he had been sitting up with Nézan all night."

● "And you didn't see him after that until just before noon?"

"No, I didn't. He said that he would have to work all morning, but would see me at lunch. And we had a fine time talking over our various experiences at the table, too."

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself," Lawson said.

He looked up at a hail from Kortner.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Come and see our accommodations," Kortner shouted. "Shower-bath and everything."

"Is he trying to be funny?" Lawson asked Madeleine.

"No," she said. "The rooms here, at least my own, are very nice. Shower and everything."

"Yeah?" Lawson was surprised. And to Kortner, "Be right with you."

Lawson and Kortner had a room together. It was large and cool, and contained complete accommodations for two, including, sure enough, a shower.

"And look here," Kortner said proudly. "The Arab who brought me in showed it to me." He pointed to a row of buttons on the left wall, each marked in French.

"Everything, everything," Kortner said. "You can't imagine." He pushed one button, and from the other wall a box appeared, with translucent screen in front.

"See?" Kortner said. "It's a television set. We can tune in, get stations everywhere. Thirsty? Press this. (Lawson noticed that Kortner's finger had lingered over a button marked *bière*, and smiled.) "Telephone? This one. Call anybody, even the Consul."

"Even outside?"

"No," Kortner said. "Not outside. Anybody in here."

When Lawson had amused himself sufficiently with the wonders of his room, although there were plenty he did not find out about until later, he walked out into the open with Kortner, to try in some manner to get order into the fantastic confusion of his mind. He was both pleased and surprised when he saw that Madeleine Henderson's room was next to theirs. She had said something about it, just as he left her. Her father wouldn't allow her to stay in the observatory, where he and Vane, and Nézan, and, for that matter, the Consul, all had separate rooms.

Lawson and the rest were eating their evening meal. Lawson was astounded to learn that the artificial foodstuffs were so palatable, and so evidently based on familiar flavorings. He recognized the taste of, and ate with gusto, synthetic lentil soup, French bread, macaroni, tenderloin of beef, fried potatoes and stewed corn. Suddenly Professor Eric Vane entered the room. The diners looked at him curiously as he took his seat, and Lawson covertly watched him. Here was the shaggy-haired man who had only this noon destroyed the toughest section of the French capital. How would he take it? He seemed in good humor, and in good appetite.

Vane swept the table with his eyes as he sat down, then rose courteously to his feet.

"Ah," he said. "Strangers, I see. And Miss Henderson! What a pleasant surprise! Are you glad to be with us?" He looked ironically at her as he spoke. Then, without waiting for a reply, he shook hands with Lawson and Kortner, both of whom were introduced by Hammersmith.

Seated again, all eyes focussed on him. He looked about cheerfully, knowing what was wanted.

"Vell?" Hermann finally exploded. "Vell? How did it go?"

"First rate," Vane replied. "Although it was a bit messy." He looked sardonically at the fat German. "Ah, what a pleasant afternoon you might have spent with me, watching the turmoil in Paris. Well, I did what had been planned for me, and I never had to move a finger. The ramshackle stone houses crumbled into dust, the cruiser moved ten miles into the air, and the green cloud was sent alone on its way out over the Atlantic. It was an amusing sight to

watch the French air force tagging along after it. Futility was the word I wanted.

"They felt sick, I'll wager, when it outdistanced them. The day was cloudy; nobody could see us, but I could see with my infra-red telescope. Such confusion, Hermann! They called out the fire department, the army, the reserves and the police. They thought, of course, that I had left in the cloud. The whole section of town was razed to the ground. All they could do was keep other people out of it."

"Ten thousand dead?" Hammersmith asked.

"Easily," Vane answered negligently. "Poor devils, even though they're better off now than they've ever been in life."

Hammersmith looked significantly at Lawson, as if to say, "You see?"

Lawson must have shown his shocked surprise at Vane's indifference. Vane spoke directly to him.

"Surely you must see that they're better off dead? After living all their stunted lives in filth and lecherous horror, with the prospect of filling a worm-filled, dirty grave, they have died a clean death. Nothing, now, will disturb their ashes or their bones. If there is a continuity in life after death, they're probably thanking me right now."

Lawson only nodded. He could think of nothing appropriate to say. But he thought that at least, people should have their own choice in the matter; whether to live or die. And what was there familiar about the thought of those wretches thanking him for their death?

● Vane turned waggishly toward Henderson.

"A fine day's work, I think," he said. "The world, now, ought to fall in more readily with our rebuilding program. After all, it would be cheaper to salvage whatever isn't entirely worthless from their slum districts."

"Naturally, naturally," Henderson said. "And, if you will pardon my saying so, perhaps a bit more humane."

"Humanity!" Vane snorted, lowering a spoon into his soup. "Humanity! What crimes we commit in thy name! Personally, I would much rather kill a few dozen beasts in the form of man than even one rabbit. At least, you must admit that there is something natural about the life of a rabbit: he lives cleanly, as nature intended, and is not steeped in vice and corruption."

"Do you think, then, we should go back and live in trees and caves?" Madeleine asked sharply.

"Certainly not, my young lady," Vane retorted. "Man can live naturally without living the life of a wild animal. A man living in a cave would be as unnatural as a rabbit in a palace."

"What in the world?" Lawson asked in an aside to Hammersmith. "Hasn't the man any nerves?"

"Oh, yes," Hammersmith replied. "He's all right, really. Wouldn't harm a dog."

"But his killing all those defenseless people—"

"Bless me," Hammersmith said. "*He* didn't do it. He had nothing to do with it. Probably didn't even know it was going to happen until this morning. He was sent along as observer, that's all, because he isn't squeamish about those things."

"And the Consul can trust him like that, on the space cruiser, out of his reach? Couldn't he have bolted?"

"Not he," Hammersmith explained. "He had nothing to do with the direction of the vessel. Its course was all plotted here, and it was guided by several of our charming robots."

"But he could have smashed something up, surely!"

"No. I sent a couple of my pets along to prevent that very thing."

Before Lawson could ask for an explanation of this cryptic statement, one of the Arab help ran wildly into the room.

"Mat! Mat!" he cried. *"El Sidna Nézan mat!"*

Dead! Lawson thought. Nézan dead! As if by instinct he turned to Vane. He saw a transformed man: a look of intense surprise and bewilderment was on his face, a bewilderment mixed with consternation, and he sprang to his feet, upsetting the chair behind him as he did so.

"No!" Vane cried. "No! Impossible!"

He swung toward the Arab, and said in Berber, "He is sick, not dying; not dead! He is not dead! *Houa mrid, macache felmenet, macache miyet! Macache mat!*"

"*La!*" the Arab replied. "*Mat! Mat!* He is dead! He is dead!"

Vane looked at him a moment longer, then turned slowly toward the robot, but no sound, either of confirmation or denial, came from it.

"Incredible!" Vane said. All semblance of irony had fled from his blanched face. "Incredible! I don't believe it." With that he spun around and ran into the open courtyard.

A babble of voices rose over the table. Henderson reassuringly pressed his daughter's arm; rose to leave. "I must go," he said. The others followed him out, suddenly struck to silence. Lawson glanced at Hammersmith, still sitting, his hands over his eyes. For the first time he saw fear in his face.

"Come on," he said.

Hammersmith looked at him dully.

"But that would mean that Nézan was not . . . . No, I won't believe it, I won't believe it until I see it."

"Come on," Lawson said again.

"It's appalling." Hammersmith said. "Vane and I both thought that Nézan . . . . In fact, we would have staked our lives on it. But if he wasn't . . . . " He looked fearfully around him before he left the room.

In the observatory, everybody was grouped by an open door. A slight, wizened Arab was speaking to Vane, evidently repeating something that had been said before.

"He gave no sign. I had turned, to fetch a glass of water, and when I came back, his eyes were shut; he was no longer breathing. I called to him. He did not answer. I shook him. He was cold, still. He was dead. Then I sent Driss."

Vane looked at the assembled scientists, and rubbed a hand over his eyes.

"He's dead," he declared. "There isn't any doubt about that."

The rest crowded into Nézan's room. Lawson saw the thin, emaciated body lying on the bed, as if asleep. It was evident to him that there was no life in that body. Nézan, he thought, had a finely shaped head: a high, white forehead, strong nostrils now strangely shrunk, and a determined, slightly receding chin. His eyelids were closed, but Lawson knew at once that the eyes could never have been red and piggish, and they were not tiny.

"He's dead? There's no doubt?" Hammersmith asked Vane. The two looked oddly at each other.

"See for yourself," Vane replied, after a moment.

Lawson, too, because of the mystery he was unable to share, was curious. But it took only a perfunctory examination to convince him that there was no life in the body before him. Of that there was no doubt in his mind. He was sorry that he had not met Nézan before. But there was no use being sorry for that, either, he said to himself. What would it have gained him?

CHAPTER VIII

The Burial

● Nézan was buried the same night. The Arabs, led by others with flaming torches, carried the body in an open pine box, wailing their immemorial death chant, a chant that rose and fell in four minor keys, weirdly and monotonously. He had always wished to be buried Arab-fashion, Lawson was told, before the midnight of the day of his death. A shallow grave had been dug, and his body was lowered bumpily into it, then covered with a mound of dirt and rocks. The Arab mourners never ceased their chanting until a small, wooden headpiece had been placed upright over the head, facing Mecca and the east. It was chilly outside. Lawson shivered as he returned to the dining chamber in the darkness, feebly lit by the bobbing torches.

No one called for more food, but many bottles were opened that night. "Nézan wouldn't want us to grieve for him," Vane had said, and the others shared his view.

Lawson sat apart from Vane and Hammersmith, who conversed in low tones. He himself was for the most part silent: he

had received too many heterogeneous impressions that day to assimilate them, and he joined in the lagging conversation with the Hendersons only when directly spoken to. Everyone seemed quiet, repressed. Even the rumble of Hermann's voice was not so boisterous as formerly.

Just before eleven o'clock, he heard Hammersmith say, louder than he had been speaking;

"Well, here's to the end of an era!"

Vane smiled, and had started to lift his glass, when the golden robot's metallic voice broke into the hum of conversation.

"For the good of Mankind!" it said. "I am sure we have all been profoundly sorry to hear of the death of Professor Henri Nézan. But on no account must sorrow for our departed friend prevent us from executing our previously arranged plans. Our work, tomorrow, must be carried on. My work must never cease. For the good of Mankind!"

Lawson noticed that Vane had not carried his glass to his lips in response to Hammersmith's toast: he had kept it poised while he listened to the robot's voice. Then, with an angry, confused gesture, he threw it to the floor. He stood up, said something to Hammersmith, and left the room.

Gazing at the door through which Vane had disappeared, Lawson gave an involuntary exclamation of fear: coming through it was a huge, six-foot, upright gorilla. Henderson whirled at Lawson's ejaculation, but heaved a sigh of relief when the gorilla padded into the room toward Hammersmith.

"Lord!" Lawson said. "What's that?"

Henderson smiled faintly.

"You gave me quite a start," he said. "I didn't know what was coming in the door. Why, that's one of Hammersmith's 'pets,' as he calls them. Didn't you ever hear of his experiments with what he calls the H-ray, by which he was able to make intelligent men and women out of imbeciles and idiots? His process, by some method, strengthens the cosmic rays;* to all intents and purposes speeds up evolution. That gorilla you see, as well as the two others, has been advanced, God alone knows how, many millions of years in the evolutionary scale. They are as intelligent as some of the Arabs, and much more faithful."

"Lord!" Lawson said, still sweating. "Can they talk?"

Hammersmith, approaching with the gorilla, heard his question.

"No," he said. "My work was done only on the brain. The vocal cords are still those of the ordinary gorilla, so, unfortunately, they can't speak. But they understand. Don't you, boy?" The gorilla looked silently at him from his small, red-rimmed eyes, then uttered a low cough, nodded his hairy head. "They're very smart, my pets," Hammersmith said. He left the room, the gorilla lurching slowly after him.

There seemed to be no doubt, now, that it had been one of Hammersmith's "pets" he had seen the night before, through the rain, following him around the closed circle of the force-wall. But finding that out, strange to say, didn't relieve Lawson's mind a great deal. For instance, had Vane and Hammersmith simply been acting a part when the robot's voice had spoken? Had they really thought that Nézan had been the Menace, or had Hammersmith told him that simply to pull more wool over his eyes later on? Their consternation had seemed genuine enough, but Lawson was beginning to perceive that first impressions were often deceitful, especially around the establishment of the Lunar Consul. He had heard a voice, but had seen nothing. He had noted the actions of those around him, but he had not understood them. What was at the bottom of it all? How much could he believe of what Hammersmith told him? Or Vane? Or Henderson? Or, for that matter, Berglied, or Schulte, Guglielmo, Alekhine, Hermann? What did he know of these people that might make him respect their apparent honesty?

Lawson shook his head to clear it of the slight numbness he had felt ever since he had first seen Nézan's body. After a moment it seemed clearer. He thought back over the funeral. There could have been

* Millikan rays.

no chicanery. He had seen Nézan being lowered into the grave with his own eyes.

After he had gone to his room, he was pleasantly surprised at the cleanliness of the sheets; the softness of his bed. And he was even more surprised when he awoke the next morning to note that he must have fallen asleep at once. His head had been in a turmoil, he had never expected to sleep until he had managed to reduce it to some sort of order.

● The next few days were days of physical inaction for Lawson, but of intense mental activity. He attempted no direct detective work, but preferred to get a set of facts through a species of indirection he found both difficult and galling. He asked innumerable questions, all of which seemed to lead him nowhere; he followed clue after clue, to find himself always at the end of a blind alley. But sometimes he appeared, by tracking two divergent clues, to end in the same blind alley, and he was convinced that some of his fundamental concepts would have to be radically revised before he would be able to find any correlation in his work. He therefore tried to clear his mind of his preconceived ideas on the matter; make his mind receptive to everything going on around him.

He tried to content himself with the facts he had at hand. Once familiar with the routine of the place, he thought, eventually he would be able to discover discrepancies here and there; accounts and explanations that would not jibe; loopholes through which he might some day launch an attack. But he knew it would be a hard, uphill climb at best, one perhaps destined to failure from the start. There was so little to work on: the mystery was dark and furtive, and damnably illusive.

After Kortner's first interview with the Consul, Lawson knew that, temporarily at least, he had lost a friend. He no longer had his confidence.

"He's great," Kortner said. "No matter who or what he is, he's great. Think of what he's going to do for us." His eyes shone with almost fanatical light. "No more rich, no more poor. No matter what he does to the world, it will be better off than it has been."

Lawson stared at him guardedly.

"Sure," he said. "It will be better for the Consul."

"For Mankind," Kortner insisted. "For everybody."

"No, Kort," Lawson said. "It may be a more peaceful world, a quieter world, a world less full of mistakes. But mankind will lose its initiative: it will lose its knack of solving its own problems in its own way. And then if something happens to the Consul (I can't believe in his immortality) the world will be considerably worse off than before. The Consul won't be there to decide on what should be done; man will have become helpless without him."

But Kortner was obstinately sure of himself.

"That won't happen," he said. "The world, seeing the track cleared ahead, its most pressing problems out of the way, will use its own initiative in forging ever further in advance."

Kortner spoke as if by rote, and Lawson quickly saw that nothing could be gained by argument; whatever the Consul had said to him must have impressed him deeply and made of him, for the time being, a willing and enthusiastic convert.

"I'm to start work tomorrow," Kortner announced proudly. "I'm going to work with Guglielmo, who needs an assistant. I'll see the laboratories; be able to do my bit."

Lawson gazed after him sorrowfully as he left the room. Even though he was a man who kept his own counsel and tried to find the solution to his own problems, Lawson, as many others, felt the need of human friendship; some person in whom he could whole-heartedly confide. With the death of his father, who had been guest instructor of the social sciences in Iraq, the last person he had been able to communicate with freely had been lost to him. Whom, among the wolves who prowled around the Consul, could he trust? In the days that followed, he was even more sure that he was treading on thin ice: he pretended a camaraderie that he did not feel,

but made known his own budding plans to no one.

When Kortner had gone to the laboratories the next day, Lawson went on an exploration trip. He had the whole day ahead of him, and nobody was in his way. From the fact that there had been no remarks when one of the scientists did not come to meals, Lawson knew that his absence would cause little comment. He walked toward the barrier to the south, which cut off most of the mountains from him. He would have liked, in his present frame of mind, to do some hard, physical labor; something to keep him occupied. He intended, that day, to make a complete circuit within the force-wall, to discover if, by any chance, there was a weakness in it.

The day was warm, and, as usual, there was no wind. He had learned that the "window," globe-like, covered them entirely, but at the top was like a sieve, admitting the sun's health-giving ultra-violet rays, and air and moisture. The ground sloped up gradually ahead of him as he walked to the south, so that, when half-way to the force-wall, he was able to overlook the buildings, spread out in the shining square below him. He stopped to look at them, but saw nothing out of the ordinary: one of Hammersmith's gorillas wandered aimlessly in the courtyard, and that was all.

Lawson took a deep breath, exultant in the freshness of the outdoors.

At the "window," he tried to carry on an examination of its properties. Alekhine, in a moment of enthusiasm, had told him of its composition. The barrier, as the name the Consul had given it implied, was a wall of force. By some trickery, Alekhine could manipulate, but not explain it. The force-wall was set up by the power of two gravitational fields, one offsetting the other, so that where they met there was the equivalent of the irresistible force meeting the immovable object; neither could give way, and, in pressing against each other and holding each other back, they presented in all truth, a wall of force through which nothing known could pass.

When it had first been erected, Alekhine said, nothing could be seen through it: even light rays had been shut out. But, by making it minutely porous, so that no solid could break through, light and heat could enter, and it was possible, by expert handling on the levers that controlled its terrific power, to open it part by part, section by section; even to peel it, invisible layer by invisible layer, until it was so thin that no instrument could measure its thickness. But even then, under the least of its power, it had an unknown and terrible might. "Even I do not know," Alekhine said, "how much pressure it could withstand. At its full power, only a gravity greater than that of our earth could hope to disrupt it."

● Now, Lawson knew its power was at its minimum, but he quickly found out that his own strength was far too puny to affect it. He knew, too, that had he been able to make an impression upon it, which, by its own engendered heat, would automatically step up its power, he would be even more helpless than before. No, he thought, there was no escape that way: the only way was to smash the Consul from within. Suppose he could escape! It would be exceedingly foolish, he felt sure, to attempt to lead an army back. What earthly army, what earthly offensive weapon, could pierce a force as strong as all of earth's gravity?

The land was rockier than before, where he now was walking, musing to himself, and he failed to see Madeleine Henderson sitting alone next to the barrier, staring off into the mountains, until he kicked a pebble and she turned, with a start, to face him.

"Oh, hello," she said. "I thought it might have been one of those horrible apes." Lawson noticed that she seemed downcast, despondent.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She looked at him a long time before answering.

"No," she said. "I'm afraid. I'm afraid of everything here. It's all so terrible, so sinister. People working underground, to undermine the institutions of the earth on which we stand. I don't like it."

"None of us like it," Lawson said, mildly.

"Oh, yes they do," Madeleine said. "Some of them do. Some think the Consul will be a benefactor. But how can they? Don't they see that he is leading us into slavery, a slavery even more degrading because it may be voluntary? Don't they see?"

She looked at him, her eyes hurt and bewildered. And Lawson understood that there was one person, anyway, on whom he could rely. The girl's pain was genuine. She, in insane surroundings, had kept her sanity and her healthy outlook intact.

"I see," Lawson said. "And I think others of us see, but are only afraid. We don't know, we can't know, against what to revolt."

"No," the girl said. "And I'm afraid."

Lawson could not bring himself to utter the reassuring words that sprang into his mind. Words would not deceive her: she was not so naïve as that, and Lawson was no Pollyanna. Her dejection, he knew, was partly a let-down from her complete happiness of the day before, and therefore part of it would pass.

"And," the girl said, hesitatingly, "I'm afraid for my father." Mutually, they must have decided that they could confide in each other, for her assertion was a gesture of trust. Here was a fear she most certainly could not confide in her parent, and she had chosen Lawson for the confidence.

"Why?" Lawson asked bluntly.

The girl was suddenly weary.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "It's all so gruesome here. There's no balance in anything. If anyone had suggested, a month ago, that my father was helping . . . . But he is. And he acts so strangely. At mealtime he sometimes doesn't hear what I say. I have to speak twice, and he seems so worried, so . . . . beaten."

Lawson had noticed, too, that Professor Henderson was quiet, but he had not known him previously. He thought that his quietness was due to his natural mildness, an aging offshoot of his kindness and goodwill. His daughter, however, should be able to see if there were something wrong, something different.

"I wouldn't be so bothered about it, if I were you," Lawson suggested. "After all, your father has a right to be worried. He sees as well as we do that the Consul, in the long run, can leave only ruins in his path."

"But who is this Consul?" the girl asked. "We have—" She halted, then continued bravely, but with a great effort—"we have nine to choose from, naturally, without going into the unknown."

"Who?" Lawson queried.

"Why, think," she said.

"Well . . . . All right. There's Vane, Hermann, Schulte, Alekhine, Berglied, Hammersmith, Guglielmo, Manning—" He hesitated.

"And Henderson," Madeleine Henderson concluded.

"But—"

"Oh, I hope not," the girl said. "I hope not. But we must think of all the possibilities."

"Then there are fourteen; maybe more," Lawson declared, in an effort to steer the conversation into easier channels. "There's Kortner, Lawson, the Lunar Consul himself, and Miss Henderson."

The girl smiled up at him.

"Yes," she said. "We mustn't leave out any suspect. But we can start right now by eliminating a few."

Lawson breathed easier.

"All right," he said. "Go ahead. Eliminate."

"Well." She looked at him directly. "You're not the Lunar Consul, are you?"

"No," Lawson said, with a grin. "I'm not."

"I'm not either," Madeleine said. "We can believe each other that far, can't we? We can eliminate each other?"

"Yes," Lawson agreed. "We're out. And by the same sign, no matter what he thinks of the Consul, Kortner is out. He couldn't have *been* the Consul, ever."

"And that leaves nine," the girl said.

"Not including the Consul."

"Yes, I see," Madeleine declared. "It isn't safe even to disregard that possibility. You'll have to know what, or who, the Consul is, before you can begin to act."

"What I don't see," Lawson said, "is

why you should jump at the conclusion that the Consul is human."

"Why," the girl said. "It seems fairly obvious to me. The main reason for believing that the Lunar Consul is human is that he deals with Earth, and wants to 'improve' it. Why should an alien entity have any interest in the matter? Why should a being from the moon, or any other place not on Earth, attempt to change the world for the better, or what he considers the better?"

"Sure," Lawson said. "That would be logical enough so far as it goes. But there is always the chance that the Consul is simply a small part of a considerably more far-reaching plan: by making the world bend to his will, by making people depend on him, he would make us incapable of resisting an attack from beyond the world. Once the world accepted him as Ruler, his word would be law, and his religion, too. He could stop any resistance we might make."

"I hadn't looked at it that way," the girl admitted.

"My first job, really," Lawson stated, "is to find out the Consul's make-up. And there ought to be a dozen ways to find out if he's human."

"How?" Madeleine asked.

"That's what I've got to think up," Lawson asseverated. He looked around lazily.

"Where is that pass to the Sahara you were telling me about?" he asked.

"You're looking at it," the girl said. "Straight through there." She pointed to the south.

Lawson hadn't been looking at it, but at Madeleine: he shifted his gaze from her pensive face toward the mountains, and saw the pass, a narrow, uneven gorge, and faintly in the distance, the rolling red sand dunes.

"Few people know about it," Madeleine said. "Nézan said that the Arabs formerly used it a lot, but recently no one has travelled that way. The Arabs are afraid."

"And well they might be," Lawson asserted.

That day, he made a circuit of the barrier, but learned nothing new. It was regular, and made a complete circle. When he returned to his room, he sat for a while thinking, vaguely noticing that the place had been completely cleaned since he had left in the morning. He also saw that the room was arranged so that water coming from the ceiling would run to a drain in the floor, and that the furniture could be raised by pushing one of the buttons. "Ideal for cleaning homes," he said, and then he snapped his fingers angrily. He had not thought to investigate the possibility that the "window" extended into the ground. If it did not, he told himself, there was escape: there was even a chance for a successful attack.

CHAPTER IX

The Raid on London

● Lawson decided to postpone his further investigations until nightfall. There was no point, he felt, in carrying on all his operations under the Consul's watchful eye, although it was probable that the Consul could watch him as easily at night as in daylight, providing that he never slept.

Having nearly twenty minutes till dinner time, Lawson pressed the button for the television set, and idly turned the dials. He was not so much interested in the pictures he might receive, as in learning the world's latest news. What was happening outside the barrier?

His first trial resulted only in a phonograph record of Ravel's Bolero being played in Casablanca. He was not especially edified to be able to see the recording disk whirling before his eyes, and tried again, this time for distance. He cut short an impassioned harangue by a voluble German statesman, and, after a bit of experimentation, was surprised to hear the throbbing voice of a New York crooner. Just as he had succeeded in focussing the picture to his satisfaction, and was remarking on the excellent synchronization for sound and sight, the crooner's pretty face was replaced abruptly by that of an older and uglier man.

"Special announcement," came the words from the loudspeaker. 'Special announce-

ment. The rumor of the abdication of Edward VIII, King of England, has been confirmed by telegraphic despatch. The King, after a long conference with his cabinet, has decided that he will hold his throne only on the tolerance of the Lunar Consul, until such time as the Lunar Consul cares to take over his duties. The terrible air bombardment of Paris yesterday, for which there was no warning given, is said to have prompted His Majesty in his decision. He is reported to have urged his point, against the wishes of Prime Minister Chutney, by laying stress on the probable consequences, and has already ordered the complete destruction and rebuilding of the Whitehall district."

After that, Lawson tuned in nothing but music and advertising. He tried station after station, but there was no world news being broadcast. As he heard a popular dance tune, he fell to wondering what was happening in Washington. What was the government doing? He could imagine the excitement of the populace if the government were doing nothing. Was any one living in his apartment? And what were the prices now? Still going up?

He thought of the crowds on F street, lining up to get into the moving picture theaters, and wondered whether any movie company had featured a plot suggested by the actions of the Consul. He thought, for a moment, regretfully of the easy life he had left behind him, then squared his chin in determination. This was no time for crying over the circumstances that had brought him to Morocco.

He rose to wash, and when finished with his ablutions, he saw that the "dinner light" was glowing.

News of King Edward's abdication had preceded him to the dinner table, and it buzzed with conversation.

"Ha," Hermann shouted to Hammersmith. "Your King is afraid of us, eh? What do you say to that?"

"Jove!" Hammersmith muttered. "I didn't think *he* would give in."

Vane turned his derisive smile toward Lawson.

"Well, young man," he said. "We're working tonight."

"Who is?" Lawson asked.

"You are," Vane said. "I am. The Consul has a little commission for us."

Lawson paled. Was he to witness another such orgy as the destruction of La Villette?

"Where?" he asked.

"London," Vane said. "We're to drop a few daisies on Buckingham Palace."

Hammersmith, who had been following Vane's words, started up.

"Do you mean to say, that after the King, God bless 'im, has voluntarily left the throne—"

"No, no," Vane said. "Nothing serious. A mere gesture of good will. We're going to leave a bouquet for His Majesty, that's all."

Alekhine looked up with a smile.

"A floral tribute for a retired prima donna?" he asked. "A very fine idea, I think."

"Sure," Lawson said. After his first surprise was over, he was eager to find out what actually was going to happen, and he was glad that he would have the chance of seeing the inside of the Consul's air-cruiser. Although he didn't know why he should have been chosen among the others, unless it were to watch his actions. Vane, he knew, would take an ironic pleasure in observing his reactions.

"The Consul must have had a brain storm," Vane mockingly explained to Lawson, when, after dinner, they entered the space cruiser, brought out from its subterranean hangar. "He seems to have been delighted that his scheme is working. A floral tribute, indeed!"

Lawson studied, with unsimulated interest, the interior of the golden aircraft. Although completely opaque from the outside, he could see out of it as if it were made of glass. It was a large ship, and, beside the two gorillas who never took their eyes from them, Lawson saw three robots standing in front of complicated switchboards: these were much like the one at the dining table, except that they were larger and legless, and each had three snake-like arms.

The machinery was the most amazing he had ever seen. There was a continual, silent crackling of huge vacuum tubes, and he noticed rack after rack, row after row, of spooled copper wire, seemingly in order, but with no direct contact. He saw generators like great turbines, and boxes that may have contained batteries of unknown strength. The "engines" were scattered in apparent confusion, but the confusion, Lawson was sure, was only in his own mind.

When the craft, in response to a silent robot's action, rose slowly into the air, Lawson had an instant sense of vertigo, because he could see nothing between himself and the ground.

"Strange at first, isn't it?" Vane asked, with some amusement. "It's solid enough, never fear."

Lawson flushed, and for the time being, tried not to look below him. The vessel moved in absolute silence.

"How is it propelled?" he asked.

"Schulte worked out our gravity repeller," Vane replied. "The amount of power needed simply to lift us from the ground is tremendous."

Lawson saw, far below them, the square of buildings they had just left, which faded as they rushed through the night. The lights of Fez flickered below them, and in an instant were gone. For perhaps fifteen minutes they flew eastward, then a robot's manipulation turned them north. In another quarter hour they passed slightly east of Valencia, and within an hour since they started, they had crossed the English channel. England, and London, were covered with a dense, natural fog: Lawson could see nothing below him but clouds.

They had been flying at an altitude of almost 20 miles, Vane said, where the atmosphere offered little resistance.

"We could go higher," he remarked, "but there would be no use of it. We can't possibly be seen from below."

Lawson felt no motion of descent when the craft lowered itself over the shrouded city: the Consul evidently was cautious, and did not want the ship to be seen in any rift of the mists.

"This will save us making some of our own," Vane said with satisfaction.

"Are you going to land in it?" Lawson asked.

"We'll supplement it," Vane said, "with some of our own when we get a little lower."

Dimly, Lawson was able to see a great, low building outlined in the fog below them, and there came to his ears a thin whistling, as of escaping gas, while Alekhine's fog rolled densely out from numerous hidden jets. Vane rose to his feet and walked to, and attempted to pick up, one of the smaller boxes. A gorilla followed him, watching his every movement.

"Here," Vane said curtly to the anthropoid. "Take this and throw it out."

The gorilla obeyed, lifting the box that had taxed Vane's strength as if it were a ton, and padded with it to the doorway. Vane glanced quickly at a dial.

"Twenty feet," he said. "The master is very efficient tonight."

He threw open the door, and wisps of fog curled inward.

"Out with it!" Vane said.

The gorilla tossed the box lightly out into the air, and Vane slammed the door shut. Lawson felt a sinking sensation in his stomach as the air-cruiser bounded upward, as if freed from some weight, but finally accustomed himself to the swift ascent. When they were again high over the clouds, they swooped southward, although there was no change in the direction of the vessel: evidently it could maneuver with equal facility in any position.

"Another chore done," Vane said lightly.

"What was in it?" Lawson asked.

"Gold sovereigns," Vane chuckled. "A gesture. Little love-note with it."

Lawson stared at the scientist. Was he poking fun at him?

"The only gold in the world, outside of Morocco," Vane amplified. "Really a valuable present to the British commonwealth. His Omnipotence must have been feeling especially generous this evening." Vane's quizzical smile was almost a leer as he

spoke. "Didn't know you were working for a philanthropist, did you?"

There was an undercurrent of bitterness in Vane's tone, as if his sardonic humor were only a shield to mask his true feelings. What were his true feelings? Lawson wondered. What did he think of the gift of gold, the only gold outside the force-wall, and as such the rarest element in the world?

"What was the idea of it, do you suppose?" Lawson asked deferentially.

Vane looked at him, an almost theatrical suspicion on his face.

"What?" he asked. "Why? Well, wars have been fought over less, Lawson. Why shouldn't he, if he wants to?"

Why not indeed, Lawson asked himself.

The trip to Morocco was undergone in complete silence. Vane was buried in his own thoughts, and Lawson contemplated with amazement the smooth running of the Consul's vessel. Their route this time was more direct, and seemingly more speedy.

Although in the stillness of the cruiser's flight (Lawson found it difficult to detect any motion, except in rising and falling), he unexpectedly became aware that the ship had come to a stop, and was hovering; no longer advancing. He looked at Vane, to discover that Vane, too, had noticed that something was wrong. He was staring hard into the darkness ahead of them. The air-cruiser seemed to be drifting slowly, and Lawson noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

"Something wrong?" he asked.

"Evidently," Vane retorted.

"Maybe the engines—"

"Engines!" Vane snorted. "No. More serious than that."

Far beneath them, and almost directly in their path, Lawson saw a sudden flash of light, then another, tiny pin-pricks in the blanket of the night.

"Guns!" Vane said expectantly. "Ah, the fools! And I thought there might have been something to worry about."

"Guns!" Lawson cried. "Against us?"

"No, you fool!" Vane said. "They're firing on headquarters. They can't even see us, and their projectiles couldn't reach us here if they did."

"Then we won't be able to get back?" Lawson asked hopefully.

"The poor, drivelling idiot," Vane muttered. "Of course we can get back! As soon as the Consul wishes."

"Well, what are you waiting for, then?" The words popped half-angrily out of Lawson's mouth.

Vane shrugged his shoulders.

"You should have been an actor," Lawson declared. He bit his lip in mortification. Because Vane had called him a fool, was that any reason for losing his temper, blowing up to make ridiculous accusations?

"I am," Vane replied shortly. "The imbeciles! Ah! here it comes."

The whole countryside, which had been hidden in deep, sullen shadows, was beginning to lighten, as if in a sunless dawn. Fiery purple flashes zigzagged into the night, and the darkness fluttered before Lawson's eyes. Slowly, irresistibly, as if relentless power were being used to push it back, the darkness sluggishly rolled away, to be replaced by a dazzling whiteness, as of a thousand searchlights, which threw the surrounding territory into sharp relief. Lawson was temporarily blinded by the glare, and for a time could see nothing but the light, then saw that within the radius of the light itself was a tiny black circle.

"Alekhine again," Vane said. "He's lighting up to show the fools that their shells are useless. And to let us in, as far as that goes."

Lawson remained silent. He didn't relish the thought of being twice called a fool in the same evening, so he did not utter the obvious question that came to him. How would all that light aid them to descend unobserved?

The shelling had evidently stopped, the attacking forces bewildered by the sudden terrific illumination. Then, with a speed greater than Lawson had seen before, green fog began to roll out from the besieged, and the countryside was plunged once again in impenetrable darkness. The air-cruiser dropped with a dizzying lurch, and before Lawson had time to regain his breath, he saw that they were resting easily within the square of Nézan's buildings.

CHAPTER X

The "Minute of Silence"

● The bombardment lasted all through the night, but Lawson heard it only faintly, as the force-wall kept out most of the sound. The light, Kortner told him, had been used only to throw dust in the attackers' eyes, and had not been utilized further. Lawson was amazed at the lack of interest within the "window:" everyone seemed to have supreme confidence in the force-wall's efficacy. They did no more than glance at the detonating shells that exploded harmlessly outside, and at the next morning's breakfast, Hammersmith was more interested in Lawson's London mission than in the shrieking explosives.

"How did it go?" he asked Lawson.

"All right, I guess," Lawson said. "Vane had one of your pets throw the box out, and that was all there was to it."

"See anybody?"

"Not a soul."

"Hmm," Hammersmith said. "Not very dangerous, what?"

"No," Lawson said. "*That* wasn't. But isn't there some danger from the troops outside?"

Hammersmith laughed, his young, florid face lit up with amusement.

"No danger whatever," he said. "What can they do?"

"Couldn't they tunnel under?"

Hammersmith's amusement faded.

"By Jove!" he said. "I must ask Vane." He got up and whispered something to the physicist, who turned an owlish eye on Lawson, and spoke to Hammersmith in a tone so low that Lawson could not hear. Hammersmith left the room, and returned shortly afterward, smiling.

"It's all right," he said, as he took his place next to Lawson. "No tunneling."

Just before the meal was over, the speaking robot said a few words. The Consul would allow the armed forces outside to become aware of the futility of their efforts before any move in retaliation was made. Everyone within, as they well knew, was perfectly safe. Until he saw a reason for acting otherwise, the Consul would not change his plans. "Business as usual," Lawson thought.

Lawson's mind was shaping itself more and more into the contour of a question mark. Why had Hammersmith suddenly spoken to Vane? Why had Vane been sent to London? Why, even, had the whole sorry mess been started?

That morning, the sky overcast and drizzly, he walked over to the barrier again, this time with Madeleine. At first, he was nervous as the explosives burst against the "window," but he gained courage when he saw that he was much safer inside than out. There, he knew, steel bullets were rebounding, might even be killing the gunners who had fired them. A barrage to protect the advancing infantry would not only be protective to the Consul, but would also be fatal to the attackers.

The firing ceased by the time Lawson and the girl had reached the southern barrier, and he wondered what new developments might be expected. Soon a wave of infantry, paced as skirmishers, advanced toward the "window," and halted in front of it.

"What now?" Lawson queried.

That question was obviously foremost in the minds of the nominally attacking forces, for they stopped in complete bewilderment. Lawson was close enough to note the surprise written on the faces of some of the Legionnaires, as they tentatively poked their fixed bayonets at the barrier. He heard a wild laugh of savage amusement behind him. Turning, he saw Ahmed, who had guided them from Sefrou, making obscure signs of contempt in the soldiers' direction.

"*El Kelab,*" Ahmed cried. Ahmed knew the properties of the protective screen probably as well as any, except those who had made it, and had no fear of the Christian dogs in his present position. He hurled insults, taunted the French.

And Ahmed's amusement turned to a triumphant and bloodthirsty glee as shells began dropping against the protection he had dubbed "big window." The Legionnaires were helpless to defend themselves from their own artillery: steel splinters rebounded in every direction, and man after

man, even among those who had thrown themselves prone at the beginning of the bombardment, was struck by flying fragments. Many were killed; more were wounded. Madeleine turned away in horror, unable to endure the sight of the awful carnage, and Lawson felt ill. Of those who watched from inside the barrier, only Ahmed enjoyed himself to the full. What a joke! The cursed foreigners were killing themselves.

The deadly barrage continued, none the less, for nearly ten minutes, and the front line kept to its position. At the end of that time, Lawson muttered in relief when the shelling stopped: such an assault was a poor form of suicide, he thought.

"H'maq!" Ahmed spat out to Lawson when the soldiers, carrying their dead and wounded, withdrew from the barrier.

"They're crazy, all right," Lawson agreed absent-mindedly.

"Madeleine," he said abruptly, as an idea came to him, "suppose we make an ally of Ahmed."

"You couldn't trust him," the girl replied quickly.

"We can trust him as much as we can trust any one else here," Lawson declared. "We can have him for our own trained gorilla. *Chouf,"* he said to Ahmed, drawing a 50-franc note from his pocket.

The Arab's eyes sparkled.

"Good heavens!" Madeleine objected. "That's a week's pay."

"Ahmed," Lawson said, "you are intelligent. You are a good friend, honest and courageous. May Allah bless you with all good things. Do you go underground into the big rooms? Do you hear what the Arabs say?"

Ahmed admitted that he did.

"Take this little gift," Lawson said.

Ahmed took the money.

"Baraka Allahou fik," he thanked, religiously. "The Arabs say that Mohammed is coming back to earth."

● It wasn't exactly what Lawson had wanted, but he was rather more pleased than disappointed. The more ridiculous the gossip that Ahmed might hereafter retail to him, the more likely he would be to stumble across some clue that otherwise might have baffled him. He would be able to find out about the ordinary occurrences himself: Ahmed would be on the watch for the unattainable, the inexplicable, as a sign from Mohammed, and would probably be more likely to carry a story of some happening he thought of heavenly origin than one he would be fully able to understand.

"Baraka Allahou fik," Lawson said in turn. "And when you hear other things that I should know, tell me quickly."

Ahmed smiled in agreement, and, after carefully hiding his newly acquired 50-franc note in the multitudinous folds of his *djellaba*, left them.

"We'll probably get nothing out of it," Lawson said in apology. "But there is always the chance that Ahmed can learn something that we couldn't."

"This is horrible!" the girl said. "It gets worse all the time. Oh, if something could only be done!"

"There's nothing we can do, yet," Lawson said. "I'm afraid it will take a long time to find out what to do."

"Yes," the girl said. "I th—"

Lawson waited a moment for her to continue, then turned toward her. He noticed at the same time a peculiar buzzing in his ears, a sort of coldness and numbness; he saw also, in a sudden fear, that he had gone deaf, that Madeleine's lips were moving, as in speech, but he heard no sound issuing from them. The girl's eyes widened, and her lips opened as if to pronounce the monosyllable, "Oh!" but still Lawson heard nothing.

And when Lawson, in turn, asked, "What's the matter?" he was unable to hear his question. He felt enough vibration in his throat to know that he was talking, he was certain that the sound-waves of his voice had carried beyond him, but he heard nothing.

The girl, too, had not heard his question, for she stared at him in a scared and puzzled way, and her lips moved again, but silently, like an actor in a silent motion picture. What had happened to him? Lawson wondered in dismay. He took a deep

breath, and gave a shout of such strength, that he could feel the strain in his vocal chords, but he heard no sound; no echo.

Ahmed, about three hundred yards away, turned to face them when Lawson shouted, and took a few steps forward before Lawson yelled with all his strength, "No, not you!" Ahmed evidently heard, because, after staring at them uncertainly for a moment, he again turned and walked away, but Lawson heard only the thick, watery buzzing in his ears, a buzzing, he was convinced; not loud enough to prevent him from hearing any ordinary sound from him.

He looked at Madeleine; shrugged his shoulders in expressive bewilderment. Madeleine had not heard him, that was certain. But if she had heard nothing, how was it that Ahmed, a quarter of a mile away, had heard? He picked up a stone, threw it to the rocky ground: it bounded once or twice, silently. Lawson heard no sound. He became conscious of the fact that he was surrounded by an almost palpable silence, a hush that shut out even the tiny noises of nature. It was as if a vast resonance had rolled over him, in tones that his ears were not finely enough attuned to catch, but on such a dimension that it absorbed all other sound. It was an unmusical stillness, like the muteness of death, with not even a whisper or murmur to give it life; only an incessant humming.

As suddenly as the quietness had come, it had passed. Lawson laughed shortly, relieved to hear his voice again, and Madeleine smiled, then at once became serious.

"What was it?" she asked.

Lawson whistled between his teeth.

"Whew!" he said. "I don't know. You couldn't hear me when I yelled?"

"No," Madeleine said. "I heard nothing whatever."

"Did you feel as if you were under water, or under pressure?"

The girl thought before replying.

"Yes, it *was* something like that. There seemed to be something pushing against my eardrums, keeping them from vibrating. I thought my head would pop, if it kept on much longer."

Lawson rubbed his ears reflectively. It was the Consul's work, of course. But Lawson could think of no ostensible reason for it.

He met Hermann just before lunch, and asked him if he knew what it meant, whether he too had experienced it.

"Ho!" Hermann rumbled. "You too have undergone it? We call it 'the minute of silence.' We all know of it."

"Did you have it this morning?"

"Every morning, almost. You don't know what it means? No? It means that his Omnipotence was near. We get it, often, in our work. The Consul comes to see what we do, although we can not observe him, and we can not hear him. Perhaps he is afraid, even if we can not see him. Some day we might find him by listening. Ah, yes, a clever being, our Consul."

"But what has he to fear?" Lawson asked. "What could you hear of an Invisible Entity?"

"Young sir," Hermann said, in a dignified manner. "All my life I have been expert in the science of optics. There are ways of making a man very hard to see, but he is still there, if one looks in the right place. And the Consul may be right there—" he gestured ferociously with a thick finger—"and we could not see him. But if he was over there, say,"—he gestured again—"we might see him quite easily. Our senses are quick to be deceived."

● "So?" Lawson questioned. "You think it is possible that we might see the Consul if we knew how to look?"

"But certainly," Hermann said. "*We* might see him, but perhaps not with the unaided eye. You can not see through fog, unless with the aid of Vane's infra-red telescope. You can not see the Consul, unless—"

He did not finish.

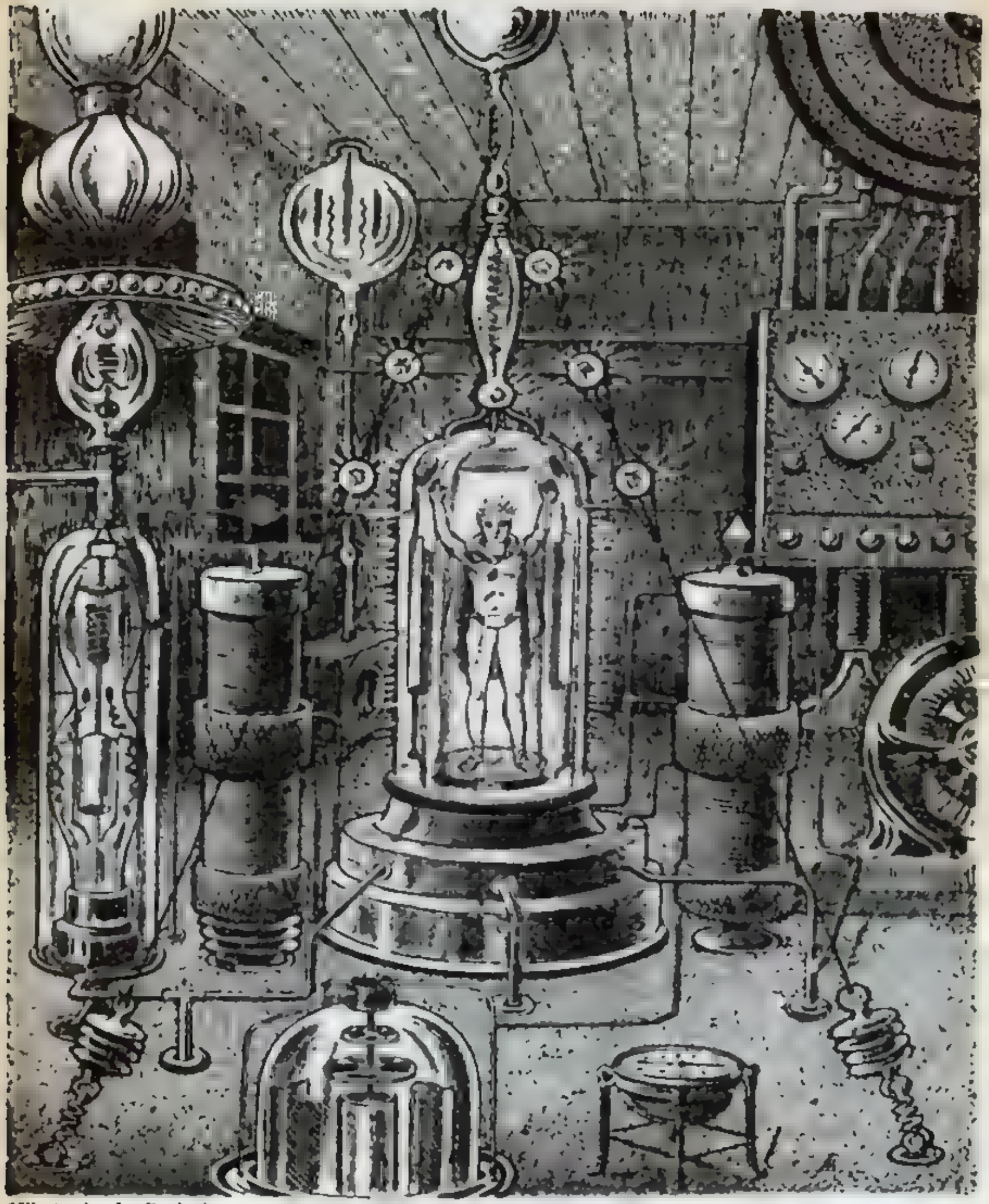
"Is there some way of seeing him, then?" Lawson insisted.

"Not that I know of," Hermann replied.

"Have you ever seen him, accidentally?"

"I?" Hermann looked astonished. "I? No, I have not. Not yet, I haven't."

(Continued on page 407)



(Illustration by Burian)

I volunteered to go back three hundred years to make certain definite changes about the year 1932.

THE END OF TYME

By A. FEDOR and HENRY HASSE

● This short humorous satire on time-travel should be most welcome to our readers. For years, our "Readers' Corner" has been filled with opinions and theories pro and con relative to the possibilities of time-traveling. Even those most opposed to this type of story, should thoroughly enjoy this amusing tale.

But please don't take our authors' theme too seriously—especially their opinion of editors in general. Perhaps we would act the same as the editor in this story, if we were faced with a similar situation. Who knows?

● Editor-In-Chief B. Lue Pencill was about to engage in a task—strange as it may seem—which Fate now and then casts inadvertently into the path of every editor; he was going to peruse a manuscript. In view of which fact he would undoubtedly demand an increase of salary.

Seated "editorially"—that is, his feet perched at an angle on his desk, which position scientists assert is conducive to better thinking—he prepared to enjoy the manuscript; which, of course, had practically been accepted already, the author being a very popular one with *Future Fiction* readers, and something of a scientist besides.

But these readers had recently arisen and demanded something new in the way of plots; and above all, they made plain, they wanted them plausible. So B. Lue Pencill, with unusual fervor, had gone so far as to exert himself in the writing of several appropriate editorials, and also letters to the more consistent contributors, in which he particularly stressed the need of more plausibility in their stories.

So it was with such thoughts that Pencill turned to the first page. "The End of Time by Hamil Edmondton," he read aloud, as was his habit when alone. With but a casual interest he began the story; but as the clock ticked and he read on, this interest became considerably more than a casual one, and soon he was reading carefully, keenly, and with much enjoyment. On and on he read, and inexorable Fate slowly marshalled her forces in favor of the heroes cast into time, and Pencill became aware that soon the story must end.

End it did, in a very logical and pleasing way, and Pencill reluctantly and somewhat reverently placed the manuscript on his desk.

"That," he stated aloud, "is what I call a story!" There being no one there to dispute him, he waxed eloquent.

"Marvelous!" he clapped a fist into his open hand. "Super-marvelous! An entirely coherent, sound, sensible story! Yes, sensible, and a perfectly plausible idea told in a most plausible and entertaining manner. A gem! None of your half-baked, slipshod, scientifically screwy work some of these pin-headed pen-pushers send in. This guy Edmondton's a genius. If the others could do half as well, *Future Fiction* would not only be on its feet again, but would acquire wings as well. I'll write a special editorial for this story; I'll send out circulars to all the readers, heralding its coming; why, I'll even—"

He stopped suddenly, peered over the rims of his spectacles toward the door, and gulped for air, reassurance, and the return of his wits.

There was a stranger in the room.

● Pencill swore something under his breath. What was the matter with that stenographer, allowing his private sanctum to be disturbed when he had expressly demanded solitude? Yet he could remember no opening nor closing of the door. But of course, he had been so deeply engrossed in that story. Ah, well; he must take things as they came.

Then Pencill took a longer look at his unannounced visitor, and came to his feet in astonishment.

The man was tall; athletically built, with dark and foreign features, but not unhandsome. He was clad from the waist down in a garment apparently of leather, close-fitting, revealing powerful limbs, and fastened securely about the ankles; the shoes, or rather sandals, of the same light material. About his neck and shoulders, a sort of cape-coat of a different material, black, fastened at the throat but open the rest of the way, revealing a bare torso, powerful and bronzed as though with constant exposure to the sun. Black hair, thick and ruffled covered his head. A wide-meshed belt of some dull grayish metal, widening at the front into an absurdly flat box-curved to fit the contour of the body.

All this Pencill took in in a flash; then his astonishment gave way to alarm, for the stranger's hands were hovering about the contrivance at his waist, fingers fidgeting nervously, as if expecting Pencill to show some hostility or anger.

But Pencill did neither. He sank down limply into his chair again, partly because his legs had suddenly become weak like wet macaroni, and partly because he saw that the stranger was even more scared, if that could be possible, than he was.

Then the editor's reasoning power came back, and he began to generalize: a drunk, a crooner, a walking advertisement, or someone paying off one of these crazy election bets.

The stranger had apparently come to the conclusion that Pencill was harmless enough, for he approached the desk without hesitation, though his manner was still one of bewilderment.

"Oh," he said, in a curious high voice entirely out of keeping with his splendid body—"Where am I?" He said this so drolly, at the same time making such a face, that Pencill felt like laughing aloud, which he did. The fellow's evident perplexity increased.

"All right," said the editor amiably, in high good humor after having read such an excellent story, "I'll bite. Come on, let's have it. What's the gag?"

"I do not believe I quite understand your meaning." The stranger's words came rapidly, with a curious clip, and no noticeable inflection of the voice. "Where am I?" he asked again.

Pencill decided to play it out to the finish, whatever the game was.

"In my office," he replied affably.

"Office—office—. I believe that I am slightly bewildered. What I should have asked is, what year is this? Surely nineteen hundred thirty-two, or some date in that particular era?"

"Amnesia," thought the editor, but it sounded unreasonable. Then a sudden suspicion dawned. Was this some gag to crash his mag with a story? He became abruptly serious.

"Will you kindly state your business here and then scr—go?"

But the stranger was now bordering on panic. "Will you please tell me the date?" he asked tremulously.

Pencill looked at him queerly for a moment, then reached out and patted him gently on the hand. "Here, now, sit down, and I'll explain everything," he said just as gently. A very serious suspicion had arisen suddenly in his mind—a suspicion that left his forehead damp and cold. He had heard that it was best to humor them—

"Yes," he began very softly, "this is May, 1932, and this is the office of *Future Fiction*, third floor, room 19, and we're having quite hot weather, don't you think? Have a stick of gum?"

A change came suddenly over the other. He seemed interested, even excited. His fists clenched and his eyes were wide.

"*Future Fiction*—it seems that—do you mean that your magazine"—here Pencill grew two inches in stature—"contains that

type of story in which events, persons, instruments, and science, of some future time are conjectured upon?"

"Most certainly," Pencill assured him, much pleased. "I am B. Lue Pencill, Editor-in-Chief of *Future Fiction,* and we print only the greatest of fiction by the best of authors." So dexterously had Pencill made many of his readers actually believe this last statement, that he almost believed it himself. "But you seem greatly interested," he went on, watching closely his queer visitor, who might be dangerous. "I take it that you read the magazine yourself?" He might have wondered if that fact is what made his visitor that way.

The stranger seemed not to hear the editor's question. "How wonderful!" he exclaimed fervently. "How really wonderful! By what great Fates are our destinies guided! How fortunate I have been! I did not expect any such luck as this. Mr. Pencill. My name is Tyme. To come to the point, Mr. Pencill, I have just come from the year 2232."

● Mr. Pencill didn't bat an eyelash. He was beyond all incredulity.

"Tell me, Mr. Pencill, you have no doubt read stories dealing with the possibilities of time-travelling?"

"Yes, in fact I've just—"

"Fine! Then you surely will not doubt me when I say that I am from another time-world. You surely will not doubt me when I say that a few short moments ago, and yet three hundred years hence, I was, and have yet to be, a citizen of the twenty-third century, of the year 2232. You will not doubt me when I say that I have done the long thought impossible, have surmounted the impassable obstacles, have succeeded in *projecting myself three hundred years through time!*"

Pencill's head was spinning like a top. "Oh, no," he whispered, "certainly not."

"I have come back to this floundering age to make certain helpful changes, which in turn will have an effect on us in 2232. And through you, they will believe. Yes, Mr. Pencill, you shall be the first to marvel at the changes that are to come! You shall be the first to hear my story! You shall be first to recognize the great deed I have done! You shall be first to share in the glory of my triumph!"

"Yes," whispered Mr. Pencill.

"Oh, but the Fates are with me, Mr. Pencill. I have had the most astounding good fortune to materialize within your presence. My one great fear was that I would not be believed—but now I feel safe. It causes me great wonder to think that out of all the great citizenry of New York, I emerged into the presence of the one who will credit my story most. It's positively amazing, and if I were superstitious I should say weird!"

"Yes indeed," the editor agreed soothingly. "Allow me to shake your hand." He wished he dared to yell for help, but there was only the stenographer in the next room. If he could only manage to 'phone for aid, without this lunatic suspecting. But he dared not risk arousing his suspicions. He could only listen, humor the fellow, and keep his mind alert for a favorable opportunity. But above all, keep him humored!

"And now," the editor said, "I wish you'd go right ahead, in your own way, and explain things—your plans."

Tyme did—and how!

He started with a description of his own century. He told of how interplanetary communication had come first, then interplanetary travel, through the efforts of a group of scientists on Venus.

Of the heated controversies, in issue at the time he had left, over the possibilities of a ninth dimension.

Of Earth travel by means of shafts through the Earth instead of around and over the surface.

Of how he, in spite of his youthful healthy appearance, would never see fifty again—due, not so much to the strides medical science had taken, as to common-sense living.

Of how he had labored for thirty years on the possibilities of time-travel.

Of how, while he was working on the problem, there had come a tremendous achievement—transportation by means of disintegration of the component atoms,

which were radioed to the desired destination. This great accomplishment, he had felt, would be the means of finally solving his own problem of time-travel. If the component atoms could be sent through *space* and reassembled, why not through *time?* The basis of this idea, he said, was that the individual atom itself is in an entirely different time scheme. The tiny atom whirled through its own space an infinite number of times per second, while our solar system, for instance, requires years or centuries for the same relative purpose. Relativity. So, he said, he had worked harder than ever to find something to affect the *time scheme* of these individual atoms—to such an extent that *when* they were reassembled, it would be in a different time scheme not of the individual atom, but of the whole material object. He had succeeded by tireless experimentation with an already known element even beyond uranium in the atomic scale.

"But even after I succeeded, there were difficulties. Great arguments arose as to whether the past could be changed to benefit the future. A compromise was reached, and I volunteered to go back three hundred years to make certain definite changes about the year 1932. I wish to do away with certain harmful causes, and thus at the same time, the effects. So," Tyme concluded, "here I am. I shall make a few drastic changes in politics and science, before I return to my own age."

"Yes, yes, but tell me—now that you are here, what do you intend to do first?"

"That is a hard problem, the first one which we will have to solve."

"Splendid, splendid!" the editor went on enthusiastically. "And having decided *what* we'll do first, there arises another problem—how?"

● But Tyme was not disconcerted. "That," he replied, "is the second problem. But we shall have time for that later. There is something you said a short while ago, I believe, which I was going to answer at length. A trivial matter, but one that may be of interest to you. You asked me, I believe, if I were interested in your type of fiction. Yes. In 2232 I have read a good many of your magazines—I think they were yours; ragged and yellow with age, but remarkably preserved for that length of time. Found them in an out-of-the-way place, discarded and forgotten. Your magazine, you may be interested to know, ceased publication in 1941."

"You don't say! I'm certainly sorry to hear that. Well, it's good to know that I have nine more years ahead of me, anyway."

"After a hard day in the laboratory," Tyme went on, "I would read some of those old books. I was always very amused by them. The style was so quaint, the ideas so absurd. Only a few of them ever materialized."

"Why, I have one here," Pencill reached for the manuscript on his desk, "that I thought was very good. I'd like to have you read some parts of it, and see how prophetic the author was. It may interest you. That is, if you care to."

Tyme held up a hand. "No, no, I'm afraid not," he demurred. "I presume that it will be published?"

"Why, yes; it certainly shall."

"Then I may have read it already, in one of those old yellowed magazines. Most of those I read were very humorous, though some were dry and boresome," he told the editor frankly. "As an example of the latter, I recently dug one of them out, and read a story by one Hamil Edmonton, I believe it was. 'The End of Time' was its name, I remember. It was a terrible piece of drivel, full of scientific fallacies that should be apparent even in this age. There was no basic plot and it was entirely pointless in its purpose."

Pencill became red in the face, then indignant, at this criticism of the excellent story he had just accepted.

But Tyme changed the subject abruptly. "Don't you think you'd better let the public know that I'm here, and for what purpose? Isn't there some way—"

"Easy!" The editor saw a chance and jumped at it. "The newspapers; of course. I'll call up a few now, and have them send some reporters immediately."

He reached for the 'phone; then:

"I keep forgetting that this 'phone is out of order. You wait here, and I'll use the one in the next room."

With some trepidation, he arose and made for the door, and Tyme remained seated, harmless enough.

Pencill hurried out, closing the door behind him. He used the other 'phone all right, and used it to good advantage.

And all the time, Tyme sat waiting patiently, visioning newspapers filled—except for the comic sheets—with items concerning him and his astounding accomplishment. But he mustn't forget there was work to be done. Again he praised the Fates that he had had the astounding good fortune to materialize in the presence of the one person who was best fitted to believe him and to credit the truth of his story.

So Tyme waited patiently, and the clock ticked on, and inexorable Fate was marshalling her forces, as she so obligingly does in stories.

At last poor Tyme, all unsuspecting, heard the tramp of feet in the ante-room. He arose and faced the door expectantly.

Pencill opened the door and ceremoniously ushered in those whom he had called.

He was the first to speak. Both his words and tone struck an ominous note in Tyme's ears, and caused him great wonder.

"There he is, boys!"

Tyme gazed on in interest. He hadn't thought that reporters wore blue uniforms, and blue caps, and badges on the caps, and the word "KEEPER" on the badges. He hadn't thought that reporters carried lengths of rope, and stout, laced leather jackets. He was right. They didn't!

A gentle hand grasped Tyme by each arm, and a soothing voice said:

"Gently, now. That's the way. Just come along with us. We'll see that no one harms you. We've a nice supper for you, down at the house."

Poor Tyme. On his face was the same bewilderment he had shown when Pencill first saw him.

One of the guards said to the editor in a low voice: "The way you talked on the 'phone, we thought he was violent. See, he's as gentle as a lamb."

"You'd think he was violent, if you had heard the things he told me!"

"Say, it's a funny thing, though. None of our patients have escaped, and if this bird's been runnin' around loose it's a wonder we ain't heard of it before now. But thanks, anyway; there's no tellin' when one of those kind will get violent."

Down the stairs Tyme was led, and into a special sedan waiting for him.

"Home, James," said one of the men on either side of Tyme in the back seat. "We mustn't keep Mr. Tyme waiting for his supper."

Mr. Tyme was whisked away at a speed that did not compare favorably with radio transportation.

● The only notice in the papers of Tyme's "arrival" was an inch stick on the twelfth page telling how "the Editor-in-Chief of *Future Fiction*, Mr. B. Lue Pencill, had been menaced by a lunatic, but happily the editor had soothed his feelings, and by a brilliant expedient, managed to call the local asylum."

And, the day following, there appeared the following item: "Doctors, upon examination of the queerly attired person who yesterday menaced editor B. Lue Pencill in the offices of *Future Fiction*, decided that he was quite an unusual mental case. The stranger had been confined to the local asylum pending further examination, but last night, some time after six o'clock, he somehow managed to make his escape. One of the guards stated that about six-thirty he had heard a queer 'whirling, rushing noise,' and that when he passed the new inmate's cell a short time later, it was empty. The man's escape has baffled the authorities. In his cell was found a scrap of paper with the following words, the ramblings of his unbalanced mind: 'I can see now how impossible it all is . . . . how useless . . . . The colossal stupidity of the human race is pitiable, and has reflected direfully upon following years. I shall go back to my own time and direct my work toward the betterment of the present, and leave the past

(Continued on page 385)

(Illustration by Paul)

The devilish beetle people were all around the shell now . . . . I had to admit that they were a form of intelligent life.

DEATH BETWEEN THE PLANETS

By JAMES D. PERRY

● Here is a tale that is decidedly different. When you reach the last paragraph, you will not find the beautiful heroine in the arms of our brave hero. In real life this does not always happen. A tragedy such as our present story is not tackled very often by our authors, for it is a good deal more difficult to compose a story of a type other than those of the factory-made happy-ending variety.

You have read few tales of interplanetary space that can rival this one in the sheer unusual development of its plot, and the refreshing originality of the incidents that occur on an alien world. But don't take our word for it. Read the story, and draw your own conclusions.

● The New England city was fast asleep under thick blankets and comforters on a cold, early morning of December. All was very snug and warm, except for a few hurrying people and the newspaper building. Only their families know when reporters and editors sleep.

Suddenly there was a shrill, whistling noise that traversed the paling sky. The people on the streets and the men at the windows glimpsed a strange, dully glowing object that seemed to resemble a huge cigar as it rushed past at a tremendous speed.

While the staff was searching the files on meteorites, a call came from a small village. A frightened storekeeper had been awakened by a crash or explosion, followed by a flash of peculiar, violet light. He had dressed, and guided by its flickering, had found a hole measuring about twelve feet in circumference, in which was a pool of blazing, molten metal that was sending out violet flashes.

Two reporters were sent out with orders to phone the story in to the editor. When they failed to do so, he went looking for them. He found them guarding the hole in which the great pool of metal was but a reddish glow in the morning light. They were excited and had kept the curious, quickly assembled crowd from approaching.

The editor approached as near as possible; then he went into action. A guard of state police was obtained, and soon the newspaper men were joined by members of the Institute. A small, fast truck was brought inside of the lines.

Other reporters pleaded for a chance to look into the hole, but they were laughed at and went home to report it as a meteor. The paper in possession did not contradict their statements. They were strangely silent and published nothing about it for several days.

The men were forced to sit at the pit's edge throughout the day and the chilling night, and the professors from the Institute stayed with them.

When they were able to approach the still warm mass of metal, they could not classify it. The terrific heat had crystallized nearly all of it; but they were able to note in spots that it was an alloy of aluminum and steel—something not known in this country—and that it had a very strange property. This was a rubbery resilience, so that it could be indented, but removal of the pressure would allow it to resume the original surface.

As they broke up the brittle deposit they were perplexed to find metal imbedded in it that seemed to be ordinary iron and steel, and these pieces had the form of machinists' tools. They separated them carefully and put them into the truck.

The men were shocked to find the skele-

ton of a man, the bones of which had been charred by the heat to such an extent that on release from their metal shroud, they crumbled to powder. But its form in the metal as the pieces were carefully refitted was beyond doubt. These joined the first treasure in the truck.

Around this poor body was a strap of queer, indestructible material and attached to it was an odd cylinder or sealed shell. Both of these seemed to be made of pliable quartz or porcelain, if that were possible. Unable to open the canister, they placed it in the truck, lifted great pieces of the metal with surprising ease and filled the floor with that, and then drove at top speed to the Institute, leaving but little at the crater for the crowds to paw over.

The laboratory men were very cautious in their attempts to open the lucent cylinder, and it was almost night before they encircled the top with an electric wire and slowly applied heat until it had melted through.

The editor burned his hand in snatching at the sheaf of notes that were exposed, and he read them rapidly, passing them along a page at a time to the excited circle.

● A violent discussion broke out immediately, and everyone had a theory to advance. The tired men wrangled over black cups of coffee and hasty cigarettes. To end it and to start his search, the editor took the notes and the queer cylinder and, after promising to give them to the Institute later as a reward for their silence, locked them in his house safe. Then he and the reporters went to bed to meet again early the following morning.

In his car, they hunted the lonely pine wastes of New Jersey until they located the start of the strange adventure. But the farmhouse was burned to a few blackened timbers with a forlorn chimney as a sentinel. Behind it was a deep pit without a cover, and at the bottom of it a few scattered scraps of machinery.

They picked up some pieces that might have been large coil springs and went to the nearest village. There they were told of a surly, crippled man with a horribly burnt face, and a big mute that seemed to be his servant. The man had rented the old farm about six months before and had never left it. He sent the silent giant for supplies. People that passed the house saw them once in a while around the yard, and they thought they must be gangsters hiding out and let them alone. They were positive that there had been no woman with them, however, because everyone watched it and talked about it.

Two months ago there had been a sudden flare in the sky. When the village had raced there in cars, the house was a mass of flames. The next day they found the two bodies.

The crippled man's name, or the one he had used, was obtained from the owner of the house and the village buried them in the local cemetery when no one came to claim them.

The reporters concealed their elation over the grim story and sped to their typewriters. The notes were brought from the safe and the whole fantastic account was fitted together.

Of course, other papers and scientists scoffed at the story, but the verifying statements of the Institute, and the fact that the alloy was unknown, broke down their doubt. Also, the great sincerity and simplicity of the documents could not be a hoax.

This is the story of that adventurous and unfortunate young man as he penned it during his strange experiences.

* * *

● The heat in this flying steel cylinder is becoming more than I can stand. There is but a little water left, and I shall gulp it like a drunkard and have done with it. Through the tiny slit of heavy glass there has been nothing for days and days except the blue, blinding glare, and should I, by reason of a madman's calculations, reach a planet, what is to prevent this cylinder from melting into a bright globule of metal, or from bursting into small pieces?

No. It is no use trying to delude myself. These notes I have been making have served the purpose of giving me something

to do, but that is all. I shall drink the water and wrap myself in this asbestos and cork covering and keep my eyes closed until the end comes. There is a slight haze, far, far away but that is probably due to eye strain.

I am glad that it is I and not Joan who must die in this strange manner as Ivan intended she should. But I would like to know before it happens that Joan escaped safely in my car from that crazy place. And I wish that she knew how much I valued that quick kiss when we were both frightened and perplexed.

● Joan and I had been fond of each other in college, but a young fellow without prospects or funds is wary of immediate marriage, and we went along on a fine friendly basis. I was careless, fun-loving, and flighty, and I didn't think that a serious, brainy hermit such as Ivan would give me any trouble.

But he did, and they were married at graduation. He had worked every summer, become rather well known as a young physicist, and stepped into an important job. I suppose my good-natured drifting had finally irritated her, and she had a sensible admiration for one who could do things. It went hard at first, but I was so busy trying to connect with a meal ticket that it soon passed off.

Selling automobiles for six years kept me on the jump, and I did not hear of them until I ran into Ivan one day and called at their home. He was the experimental man in an explosives concern, and comfortably fixed.

After dinner, Ivan took me away to his library, although I would have preferred to talk to Joan. He showed me the drawings of a machine; his talk became fast and excited and his brilliant eyes looked wild and funny in his solemn face. It was a queer sort of a rig, looking like a torpedo, and it rested on great springs. It was to be a rocket for testing the upper atmosphere, he said, and used heavy, technical words that numbed my mind.

The next I heard of him was when he had been in an accident. I went to see him. He was on crutches and his face was still in bandages. Joan warned me that he must not talk of his experiments, and when he started on that, I made a hurried retreat.

I called the following week, but they had left suddenly, no one knew where. I forgot about them in the misery of my failing commissions.

Then one day I received a note from Joan when I was idling around the office. I grabbed my bag, checked out, and beat it for New Jersey and, after much driving, found the little village and then the forsaken road and the shabby farmhouse to which she had directed me.

In the shadowy drive, Joan came to meet me. "Rusty, I shouldn't have brought you down here," she said, "I may be asking you into a world of trouble. Can you still act?"

So she remembered the college theatricals. I looked at her: she was young, fair, and sweet, though her face was pale and her eyes worried and darkly circled. "I wouldn't have any trouble playing the suitor if you want to make the old man forget his machines long enough to become jealous. Where and how is he?"

My humor must have gone stale, because she did not smile. "He's in the shed with the German. He stays there except to eat and sleep. I'm scared, Rusty. He has reached a crisis in his experiments and I feel that it means something terrible. I couldn't stand it alone. So if you can play the old friend that happened to stop and have some idle time on your hands, I'd be very grateful."

"Idle time is right. I'll stay until I bore you."

"One more thing, Rusty. His face is badly marked, and he's very sensitive about it."

"Poor old boy; don't worry."

"Yes, it's all been very dreadful. He came down here as soon as he was able, and I was at Mother's until last week. I think if he would have let me come in the beginning, I could have watched him better and diverted his mind at times. Now it is all too advanced—whatever it is, for he hasn't shown me—and he hardly speaks

to me. And then there are other things. But I'll see if he'll come out. Remember, you are very accidental."

Ivan returned with Joan. He walked slowly and his face was very terrible on one side, being a hideous purple. He was polite, not very friendly, and nervous. He let me carry the conversation. Joan left us to prepare dinner.

"What's the idea of the rustic retreat, Ivan."

"People are such fools about experiments. Curious noses are always prying, and then there are the restrictions of city laws. When a man has discovered something big, he has to get out into such a place to work it out. Besides, I need space for my theories." He laughed, but I couldn't see any joke and thought myself stupid. "It's a very poor sort of a house, Rusty, and I'm surprised that Joan asked you to spend the night. But it's only for a short while. That's why I didn't let Joan come with me; but last week she insisted."

CHAPTER II

Shot Into Space

● His explanation was so direct and reasonable, that I began to think that Joan had a case of nerves, caused by the isolation, the wretched place, and Ivan's concentration on his work.

It was a miserable house. When we went in to dinner, I could see that the furniture was very spare and cheap. We ate in the kitchen and were joined by a huge, silent man with shallow, blue eyes and a mop of straw-colored hair. They addressed him as Johann, so I knew that he was the German. The two men finished hurriedly, and passed through a door that was an entrance to an adjoining shed.

Joan and I washed the dishes, and then sat on the broken front steps and the mosquitoes had their dinner, though we tried to keep them off with cigarettes.

We spoke of things that we both remembered, but that did not take so long. Then I tried giving her Ivan's reasons for being down here. She was quiet for a while, but I could see her hands twisting in a pitiable manner and her voice was jerky when she spoke.

"I suppose I had better tell you the rest. When they went to the shed after dinner, I heard Johann ask if your being here meant a delay. I am sure that Ivan has discovered something very great. But I also think it is something that he has to hide. He hasn't been out of the house since he came here. He sends Johann on his errands. He allows me to walk around the grounds at night, but the German marches behind me. He sent Johann off in my car the first day I came, and Johann walked back. I don't know where it is."

"That's queer."

"I wouldn't mind that, but these last two days have frightened me. He always looks at me in the most peculiar way; as if he had done me a great wrong, or was about to do it, and was saddened and hurt by the thought, but could not stop."

"I guess he knows what a poor thing this is for you."

"Oh, he knows I don't mind roughing it. But what do you say to this? Every time I go out of my room, I lose something. My suitcase, his picture in the silver frame, my extra shoes, my dresses, everything. It is hard to believe it, but I am down to this dress and a cheap hair brush. That's what made me send for you. It all means something."

I nodded. The night seemed queerly cold and I forgot about the mosquitoes.

"And, Rusty, he made me give him all my jewelry yesterday; even my wedding ring. Said he could keep it more safely."

"You'd better go back with me tomorrow. If he raises a fuss, it can't be very serious. Not if you tell him in front of me. Or if he does, we'll make him tell us enough to decide."

"I think I will go, and I'm certainly grateful to you. We'd better go in now."

Under the light of the cheap hanging lamp, I saw that she had been crying. Disturbed and pitying, I put my arm around her and kissed her. As I did, I saw over her head Ivan's door open slightly. It closed with a faint click, and because there was no light, I thought the wind had moved it.

When she had gone to her room opposite Ivan's, I went upstairs to the canvas cot in the bare room that looked out over the shed. I thought of the mosquitoes and left the light out. I sat by the window, smoking.

In a short while, I heard the shed door open and the flare of a match lit the faces of the two men.

Johann's heavy voice broke the silence. "I say the man. The body resists better. It would not be such a risk."

"But his car. How would you explain that. We can wait. He will go tomorrow."

"Yes." The question was doubtful and poisonous with meaning.

"Yes. The young fool. Making love to my wife! As though I have forgotten their old affair. Later I can arrange something for him. To do it now would complicate things. But after my wife goes away for a long rest, there will be time." He laughed in a cracked, hysterical tone.

Johann grunted. The joke seemed to please him. "Yes, in the tube she can rest a long time. But there is room for two. I could use that car. Also, we can get away faster."

"Be still, you filthy thing." Ivan's voice was high and sharp. "I say what is to be done here. We leave here walking: through the woods. Come, let's finish."

● The slam of the door brought me to my feet. I slipped down the steps and knocked on Joan's door. "Joan, come out, quick!"

"It's you, Rusty? Just a minute." She came at once, and in the bare, gloomy hall I seized her hands and pulled her towards the door as I talked.

"Joan, we're getting out of here. He's going to kill you. That's why he took everything away. Kill you in that damned rocket thing. Send you into space. No trace. Kill you for a lunatic idea! Hurry!"

She broke away and fell back against the wall. "Sure, Rusty, sure? You're not making it up? Giving me an alibi for deserting?"

I was angry and very frightened. "My God, I heard them talking about it! I haven't got a gun or I'd stay here and see it out. Come on or I'll carry you."

I put her in the car and opened my door. A great hand squeezed my shoulder and dragged me backwards. I couldn't see the face, but the thick arm around my neck could belong only to Johann.

"Drive, Joan, drive like hell," I shouted as I tried to twist free. I staggered under a terrible blow to my head. I saw her white, agonized face, and then the car was tearing down the road.

The German locked my arms and shoved me ahead of him. I kicked at his shins, but he did not seem to mind. He pushed me in front of Ivan and held me. "She got away. It is this one now."

Ivan's face was terrible. It was a sweating mask of hatred and rage. "Very well. She won't talk. Now, my old friend, you will settle with me for your flirtation and interference. You would repay my courtesy by persuading my wife to run away, eh? I should kill you, but I am not old fashioned. Instead, I shall give you a chance to live a wonderful life, far away from all beautiful women. Bind him, Johann, so that he will pay attention to my instructions that will keep him alive. Then put the food and clothing in the tube. Place the charge and remove the roof. We shall be ready soon; very soon."

I sat on a kitchen chair, securely tied, and listened to that terrible monster as he walked up and down before me. There was nothing else that I could do. And it kept my mind away from the thought of dying.

"Can you remember that? It is necessary if you would live beyond our atmosphere."

"No. It's all nonsense. It won't work! Your damned machine will explode and you'll have a dead man to explain. Turn me loose and I'll forget all about tonight."

"Turn you loose? You are my messenger, you fool. I'll write it down."

A terrible space of time passed while he wrote beneath a smoky lamp. Then he took a black case and a knife from his desk.

I watched him slit my coat sleeve and then my shirt. "Going to bleed me, Ivan? Blood stains are hard to clear up." I wanted to make him angry and perhaps

obtain a chance for escape, but I knew it was hopeless as I looked at his staring eyes and his grim, hideous face.

"Be still! You never could make a decent joke. It is impossible to send you off tied in this manner. You would starve, and I do not want to send a corpse on this wonderful trip through space. So this little needle will put you gently to sleep for a while. Also, I spare you the jar of starting." He jabbed the needle into my arm. "Now in a few minutes I shall start you off. Be polite to the inhabitants of any world you may land on, my good Rusty, and do not make love to their wives."

He left the room, and I sat there and tried to stop thinking about myself. But everything became mixed up in my mind and I began to feel sleepy. I fought against it, but it was useless. In horror, I watched the two loosen me, carry me to the shed where I was thrown down like an old carpet. I struggled against the dark veil that was wrapping itself around me, and the last thing that I saw was the German's big hands on my shoulders, forcing me through the narrow opening. Then the veil swirled around my face and it was dark.

I awoke to nothing, if bright light, swiftly passing air, the narrow steel walls, and the sigh of the slowly escaping air cylinders could be called nothing. And that is all there has been during these days that are without night. That, and my thoughts, and the idiotic notes I am putting down.

● As I look over these notes in my scorched dented shell, I see that I wrote of a haze very far away before I explained how it was that I happened to be in this rocket-like cylinder, hurtling through space because of a madman's obsession. Then I had lain down to await death.

I do not know how long I remained in the protective covering, but a time came when I began to shiver, and I could feel my legs becoming numb. I threw off my covers and looked through the glass slit. I seemed to be in an atmosphere of finely separated ice crystals through which a light sparkled cruelly, making me close my eyes. The touch of my hand against the steel wall was a warning. The intense cold pulled the flesh away from the palm. I looked in wonder at the strange mixture through which my steel cylinder seemed to be plowing at a slower rate.

I had barely sense enough to dive under my coverings and add all the other clothing before the slow drowsiness of freezing overcame me.

CHAPTER III

The Beetle People

● I regained consciousness with an excruciating agony that seemed as if it would drive me insane. It was hours before the pain of restored circulation stopped, and I could draw more than a shuddering breath. On my face was a steady drip of water that fell from the steel ceiling, and my body was lying in a pool of it. With great effort I pulled myself up and sat on the narrow flange of a joint in the cylinder.

Around me was a strange, violet light. Anxiously, I moved to my observation slit. I do not know how long it took me to grasp the fact that I was no longer moving. When I did realize it, I think I became demented. I pounded on the walls, I cursed, I shrieked defiance at my would-be murderers, I screamed shrilly to prove that I was alive. Suddenly, I realized what a fool I was. With shaky hands but with great care, I adjusted the pressure-regulating valves and heard my remaining air hiss out into the strange atmosphere. Then as carefully and slowly, I loosened the head of the cylinder, sniffed cautiously, and eased myself through the porthole.

I lay on the spongy ground for some time against the metal wall. I was weak and excited and wanted nothing to happen until I felt better. As I glanced along my former prison, I could see that it had hit this surface at a very slight angle, say fifteen degrees, and burned a trough through it for a distance of a mile or so until it had at last lost all momentum.

As soon as I felt stronger, I sat up and looked around. There is not much to see, but what there is looks very odd. I seem to be on an immense plateau or level plain;

in fact, I can see no variation in the surface or ground, if you can call it that. This surface is of a spongy, springy substance that has a reddish color. It reminds me of those rubber bath sponges.

Across this reddish plain run innumerable small tracks or paths about two feet wide that glint like steel, but they are not near enough for me to determine what they are made of. Everywhere is this strange, violet light, which comes from nowhere that I can observe, for I can see no sun, such as we have. There is also no vegetation of any description within sight, and I doubt that there can be birds or insects. I notice that I can breathe with great ease, so quickly and easily that it makes my lungs ache.

It makes it seem an odd place, fit for the fool that adventured here. But I must find out if there is anything more than this. When I have finished these notes, I shall eat some of my excess supplies that brought me past the planets and the stars. Then I shall bolt the lid and take my first steps into this strange world.

● I have returned to my shell from which I thought I should be so glad to depart, but now it seems to me a refuge and the only sane thing I have contact with. I have left the lid open for comfort, and I can see these queer things gathering and watching me. I call them things because I do not know what else to say. I suppose they are an advanced form of life, but even the wildest imaginings of feature writers have not prepared me for them. Certainly they have life, power of movement, and a frightful mentality or capacity to adjust themselves to their surroundings. But I am getting beyond my experiences. I shall eat something and then write down what has happened.

After I rested, I closed the lid of my flying shell and put the wrench in my pocket. I looked around, but there was nothing to show a choice of direction, so with some foreboding and uncertainty I took my first steps on this strange place. My fancy makes me want to call it the Dead Planet because there is nothing that resembles any of the forms of life and vegetation as we know them. The queer, red surface seemed to spring against my feet, but after a few steps I was able to travel easier.

In a short while I reached one of the steely ribbons I had noticed and stooped to examine it. It was a sort of steel, very smooth and glistening, and laid in undeviating lines for miles and miles, except where there were wide curves joining into other tracks that crossed or ran parallel. I took out my wrench and tried to mar the surface with an edge but could not do it. The material is harder than anything I have ever known, and was bedded in the surface over which I had come.

Looking along these tracks, I caught a faint puff of something against the violet horizon and watched intently until it came again. It was very queer; one moment it would be like a small ball of sulphur that would mushroom out, and the next it would be a spray such as finely divided mercury would make.

I don't know why, but I thought there must be small volcanoes, and I decided to investigate. I felt that my strength had returned, and that to lie around the shell until my food was gone and I should starve would be silly. I could not understand why I felt no thirst.

I found walking along these bright, hard paths much easier than on the red surface, and I must have gone along very fast. I came to a ravine or wide ditch, the first break in the smooth surface I had encountered. Here the little tracks converged and crossed in a ribbon of double width and then spread out again on the opposite side. There were no signs of support to this flat stretch of metal, and I knew that it would not support me. It was not very wide, and I knew that I could jump across.

I stepped back, took a little run, and passed over easily. But I was startled as I realized that I was about twenty feet in the air and floating along like one of those absurd figures that are paraded by Macy's at Christmas time.

It was so ridiculous that I hung there in the air, laughing until my sides ached. After a while I decided that it was not so

funny, and looked around. I could see the little puffs of volcanic smoke clearer now, but they seemed to come from a great hollow or depression rather than from a peak as I had thought.

I grew tired of this free ballooning and became angry. Then I recalled the first principles of this art and tried it with success. Immediately, I sank towards the red surface and the little paths again. I bent my knees against the shock. I felt something crunch under my feet.

There was a shrill, tiny gasp, and I looked down in astonishment and then quickly moved my feet. I had stepped on something and I sat down to examine it. Immediately a description flashed across my mind and I can think of no better one to describe the inhabitants or creatures of this place I call the Dead Planet. They are "beetles in boxes."

The thing I had stepped on was about a foot long. It had a curved, hard, brown body like a beetle and two little eyes that projected from the head and which were now turning and rolling in what must have been an agony of pain, as I had crushed the back of it with my foot. I turned it over. Its front was smooth and soft. Then I was shocked to see that in some ways, it resembled the human body. There was a small mouth and two minute nostrils, and at the downward curve of the hard shell there were two thin, long arms like match sticks, that clawed the air frantically and had at their ends a formation like tiny hands. At the bottom of the body were two scarcely discernible little stumps that were its legs, I suppose.

The damnable thing looked at me with its crab eyes and writhed and shrilled like a locust. Half in pity and half in loathing, I picked it up and flung it on the path where it shuddered and lay still.

Then I noticed that it had been sitting in something. This was a boxlike contrivance and had small wheels. Curiously, I examined it. It had a short steering handle, and underneath was a cartridge affair. When I touched this I experienced a distinct shock such as high voltage wires give. I set the little thing down—in my mind it looked like a kiddie car—and moved a lever. *Zup,* it tore away, bounced from the steel path onto the spongy surface and dropped into the ravine I had ballooned across.

Perplexed and uncertain, I looked at the dead thing on the path, looked towards the little puffs that went up into the violet air and decided to call it a day.

● I returned to my home, if I can call it that, and now as I sit and write, I can see them gathering: hurrying at incredible speed down their slick, little paths, and drawing up in lines as if they awaited orders to attack. I wonder what can happen. I should be able to step on the whole filthy, strange mess or balloon over them to some sort of safety, but I shall wait and see what they think they can do.

It is incredible, but they have trapped me and I am now a slave, a sort of superslave, of this vicious, queer life. I should have known that there must have been an advanced intelligence that could construct these paths and the small carriages that need no motive power. But I did not think that because the one I had killed was so ugly and helpless looking. It shut out the thought of implements and forces of which we know nothing on our planet.

I suppose I had fallen asleep, for I suddenly realized that the heat was terrific and that there was a steady, crackling noise around the head of the cylinder. Amazed, I looked towards the opening I had left cracked open, but it was gone, and instead, the head was almost closed by a deposit of sulphurous metal that stunk and fused as it built itself up, quickly closing the remaining gap. I was afraid to go near it and looked out of my slit as I had so often done during my long journey to this ghastly place.

The devilish beetle people were all around the shell now, at a distance of about twenty yards. I had to admit that they were a form of intelligent life. Anything that had a means of transportation and could set up tripods from which they were able to shoot this aluminum-like metal that was sealing me in, must have intellect and reasoning.

Soon it was finished, and they went away leaving a few to guard. In what must have been another twenty-four hours, they returned in greater numbers than before, and with a large fleet of wider and bigger "kiddie cars."

They set up more tripods and towers, none very high, but in an exact, mathematical pattern, and then they turned loose the strange power that they control. It is like an X-ray as far as I can understand it but, instead of penetrating, it propels or lifts. I could feel the shell tip sharply and stay in that position, and then I could hear them placing their cars underneath.

Everything was quiet for a while as they changed their power stations and made ready to lift the other side. This done, and the carriages set underneath to their satisfaction, they went away for some time—perhaps another day—and then they came back and attached a long string of their carriages, or "kiddie cars" as I insist on calling them to my ship. This time the drivers were in the cars.

I do not know how long the journey took. There was always a tendency to bog down in the springy surface, and we made a great detour to avoid the ravine over which I had sailed so queerly. When they rested, and things stopped bumping and clanking in my shell, I would hear the shrill, locust-like tones and know they were talking to each other.

Finally we arrived at the great depression I had observed, and in my shell, I was carefully skidded to the center. I watched as closely as possible, but from my slit I could only observe what seemed to be a great mine of some bright metal, and some things on the sides that looked like furnaces or smelters.

CHAPTER IV

Slavery and Torture

● Once more I am at my notes. I think they help me to keep my balance in this mad, cruel place. They cut away the head of the shell and I thought I should be burned to a crisp before they finished. For days my body was covered with painful blisters.

When I crawled from the jagged hole that had been burned, I looked around. I was in the pit, as I thought, and it was a metal mine. The sides were very steep, and around it were the little paths or tracks, but here they were much broader. Along the paths I could see some of the beetle creatures in their toy wagons, and each held a black rod. It reminded me of the guards at the state prison. It was a very accurate guess.

Behind the paths, in the sides of the hill, were tier upon tier of small burrows like the sections of a honeycomb, and the steely paths curved upward to the entrances and then down again. The beetle creatures would come flying up to them, stop their carriages, place them in front of the openings, and then crawl inside. Each opening had a queer mark over it corresponding to the one on the carriage.

Gaining nothing from watching this bee hive, I looked around restlessly. There was one of the guards near me, and I moved my arm to pick him up. Instantly, he raised the black rod in his feeble, matchlike appendages, and I felt the most horrible shock go through my arm. In great pain I grasped the numb limb and noticed a small, black mark upon it. I would not do that again.

I sat down. The jarring and jolting of the long journey had bruised me and taken away my strength. As I sat there, sore and wondering, I heard something coming towards me.

I shall try to describe them. They are half-humans. That is, they are shaped like us, and in a vague way, look like us, but there the similarity ends. Their heads, which are unusually large, wobble uncertainly on rubbery necks and their bodies are board-thin. I do not exaggerate. They cannot be more than six inches thick at any part. They seem to be diseased, because their bones are soft and bend like green boughs. Their arms are unusually long and in some cases scrape the metal upon which they walk. Their legs are short in the same extreme, and their feet are blunt, round

stubs. How they move around is beyond my comprehension, and their ability to do their slave work is pitiable. I have seen children of six that had far more strength and were capable of more sustained effort.

I stared at them and they goggled back from the ring they had formed. They grunted one to another in a wheezy way and swayed on their rubbery legs. They certainly were dreadful.

Suddenly, there was a shrill locust noise from the beetle creatures, and I could see the guards converging upon us. These strange half-humans commenced to bellow and shuffle away, but they were not quick enough and they howled and swayed across the hard metal as the rays played upon them.

I could not help laughing, but in a moment I was raving and cursing as they concentrated their shock machines on my body. I tried to run, but the strange rays seemed to crumple my legs under me. Helpless, I reached the group of thin creatures and saw that they were picking up metal in a furious manner and moving it on sleds toward the smelters. I picked up the largest piece and walked ahead of the slowly pulled sleds and laid it down beside the hot, little furnace.

It was one of the silliest moves I have ever made. The rods stopped at once, but I could see that all the beetle creatures had gathered and were watching what I was doing. Compared to the feeble efforts of the half-humans it must have been extraordinary. Since then my life has been hell, and I doubt that I shall live long. I am their prize possession and amusement. They like to see me handle big things and they are devilish about increasing the size and weight. They wake me from exhausted sleep and when I rebel they burn me with their terrible rods until I shriek and do their bidding. I shall become too tired and resentful of it all soon and then they can kill me with the rays; the weapons that keep myself and the half-humans under control.

But I am getting too far ahead. In order to gain time I went on with this comparatively simple work. The metal was light and the distances not far. Somehow, the leader knew when to stop, and they all crowded to one edge of the pit. The beetles came, drawing a cart piled with containers about twelve inches long and six in circumference. These they opened in some manner and tossed the contents down, pitching the empty containers into the pit as well. I picked one up. It is of a very curious substance that resembles quartz, and I think they will be useful to keep my small things in. The half-humans grunted to me and I came over to find them chewing on some sort of wafer substance. Reluctantly, I tried one and found them not bad, so ate my share, and I must admit that afterwards I felt rested and refreshed. Still I am glad that I have a few of my supplies left.

● The following day, when I was grunted or called out of my tube and had joined in the work, I thought of an idea of escape. I reasoned that if I had balloned over the ravine, I should be able to get out of here in two jumps if I acted quickly. The result has been sickening.

When I saw my chance, I gave a great run, sucking in air to the utmost and jumped from a pile of metal. I landed on the side of the pit and did it again. I was above the pit and about ten feet above the red surface of the plain. The beetles seemed content to let me float, and I had hopes of getting away. But some came up, and soon fine, ribbon wire was flying all around me and tangling me up. This came from a sort of gun apparatus that some of them had. Then the ends were tied to the carriages. I was hauled over the pit and the half-humans made to pull me down.

Then I witnessed a horrible demonstration of what they could have done to me. They signaled out the sickliest of their slaves and in some manner made him understand that he was to imitate my recent performance. The creature jumped and hung suspended above the pit; they wove their bands around him and then they turned the rods or torches on him until he fell to the ground a horrible, burned, and unrecognizable object. They need not fear. I can die other ways than that.

● It seems as though I have made no notes for months. Of course I have no idea of time. All that passed away very soon. But I think I should finish them up, for the end has come.

They have taken me out to a deep pit that I had to dig for them, and measured me against the skeleton of a cigar-shaped cylinder. I know what they are going to do; I can understand the immense springs, recoil chambers, and propulsion head at the bottom of the pit. It is similar to the one in which my flying tube must have rested so long ago. I believe that they are doing it as a grim jest or a gesture of ability. They will send me whirling out into the waste places between the worlds. It will be a spectacle to them. And I do not care. Death has toyed with me so long that we have become friendly. And Death would come soon here, anyway.

From the first day to this one, when I am writing my last account, they have tortured me to do for them the things that these miserable, enslaved creatures have not the strength to accomplish. I have widened their bridges, hauling on my back great sheets of this curious metal that comes from the smelters. I have stood over their smelters pouring into them the raw, porous material and my strength has melted away in the heat.

Oh, I have paid for the death of the miserable thing I crushed in my first adventure!

As I glance over all this, I see that I have not explained the pathetic things with which I lived so long. Gradually I have learned the meaning of their grunts and squeaks, and this is what I have been able to piece together.

These flat, half-humans lived far away on the edge of the plateau. They subsisted on a vegetation that grew there, and they had no need of water. But the vegetation strangely and suddenly dried and perished, and the great herd dwindled from starvation. Weakly, they wandered across the dead, reddish plain until they came to the ribbons of steel. Uncertain, they stopped and were quickly surrounded by the beetles. They tried to escape and many were burned to death by the rods. The rest were herded into the pit and are dragging out their miserable existence. Their meager, bitter lives seem to be void of sex, and soon they will all be gone. Probably, by that time, the uncanny beetles will have mined and refined enough metal or found other ways of extracting it.

● As I look over these notes, they do not seem very clear; yet I doubt if I could have done more. I have been the slave of a queer intelligence. They have never given me much chance to observe them closely. They are vicious and distrustful.

Proof of that is in my poor, blasted legs that they have burned so frequently. I am finishing this as rapidly as possible because I have been taken to the emplacement again and all is ready. It is somewhat like the shell I arrived in. I don't think it will work.

I will go to the smelter with this container that has held my notes, and by taking a hot strip of metal, seal it. Then my life is finished, part of it being a few ill remembered facts on the earth I left, and the rest a nightmare of events and sensations in the flying shell and then in this red hell. I have written my own obituary, anyway, and that is something that not many do.

I know now that I am to leave this place that is truly the Dead Planet. The beetle people are massing with their rods to drive me to my fate in the cylinder they have built. Can I walk that far on these stumps of legs? I must close.

THE END

(Illustration by Paul)

The huge thing, body glistening with slime, hairy appendages slowly treading water, was moving forward in pursuit of the barge.

THE TOMB FROM BEYOND

By CARL JACOBI

● **The present story should satisfy the craving of those of our readers who occasionally like to read a weird scientific tale. It is indeed a rare story that can interweave a theme of growing horror with plausible science.**

The ancient, forgotten races of earth may have had strange powers that are beyond our conception—powers that would make our science seem insignificant in comparison—powers that may some day be rediscovered by chance or otherwise. And whether these powers would be a blessing or a curse is a matter for conjecture.

Here we present a tale that is not technically cold-blooded. The story interest is highly developed, and you are sure to enjoy it.

● It was in late September, while in the employ of Payne, Largarten and Company, land agents, Boston, that I first came into that district known as the Opal Lake country. The thirty-five miles from Pine Island to Flume I had found necessary to travel by car, no trains making the run on the inland spur for the past six years, or since the cessation of the lumbering industry.

I was dead tired from a two-day trip and six-hour ride on the jerking, creeping local, and my spirits fell even lower as I sat hunched back in the rear seat of the old Ford and surveyed the forlorn aspect of the region that stretched away on all sides.

Flume, my destination, I was aware, of course, was one of those depressing oddities that one finds occasionally in the wake of American enthusiasm—a deserted town. But if the conclusion to my trip was to be an inglorious one, the approach was no less depressing. The spent day was chilly and gloomy, a raw wind whining past the windshield from the north, and the tortuous road, unrepaired since its years of unuse, wound in and out through a gaunt graveyard of second growth. To the side, fallen in various angles of despair, stumbled the rotting poles of the abandoned telegraph line, the wires dangling in ensnarled coils like some gigantic grape-vine withered in decay.

Nor was the somberness of my trip made any more pleasant by the personality of my driver. A stolid and taciturn Finn, he answered my questions with nods or unintelligible gutterals around the stem of his pipe and confined his entire attention to the uneven way ahead.

It was when we had reached a higher eminence, a point where the road mounted an old terminal morraine, that I, sweeping my gaze below me, remarked to the driver:

"Opal lake, eh?"

He grunted an agreement, and I stared down upon that perfect circle embedded there in the growth. Farther on, near the point where I judged the abandoned town of Flume to be, was a much smaller lake, this one curiously in the shape of a half moon.

"And the other . . . ?" I asked, looking up once more. "The little lake off to the right . . . . what is it called?"

The driver drew on his pipe, and a cloud of blue smoke, strong with perique, swirled back into my face. Somehow I got the impression that my question had disturbed him. He turned, glanced down at the crescent-shaped strip of water, and his lips tightened.

"That isn't a lake," he said shortly.

The man wasn't joking. As I reached for a cigarette and cupped my hands around

the match, I was about to reply that my vision, in spite of a need for reading glasses, was still unimpaired. But at that moment, the car struck a deep gash in the road, tilted sharply, and I was forced to clutch hard to keep from being thrown from the seat. When the road had resumed a comparatively even plane again, the thought had passed on.

Nightfall had gathered upon us when half an hour later we swept around a curve and drove into the empty street of Flume. It was here, according to our correspondence arrangement, that I was to meet my client, Julian Trenard. For a moment, as we drove slowly forward, I thought he had forgotten about it. Then we came abreast of the boarded-up building that had once housed the town's furniture store, and I saw him.

In the gloom, he seemed at first only a blacker shadow standing there motionless, hands hanging at his sides. He was tall, and his height was even more accentuated by the long black rain-poncho that draped loosely from his shoulders. He gave no sign of recognition as we clattered to a halt before him, until I climbed out of the car and stepped forward.

"Are you Mr. Trenard?" I asked hesitatingly.

My voice sent a visible shock through him, and he started to attention abruptly as though he had been immersed in his thoughts.

"I'm Arnold," I continued, "John Arnold of Payne, Largarten and Company. You received my letter?"

"Yes." He nodded slowly and after a moment extended his hand. "You may dismiss your driver, Arnold. It is only a short distance to my place, and we can talk as we walk."

● The fact that he neither wished me welcome nor expressed a thankfulness that I had come, even as a matter of courtesy, took me back a bit, and I stood studying the man in silence. In the gathering darkness, the evidences of years spent under a tropical sun were clearly apparent. He stood noticeably erect, shoulders wide and square, marking, it seemed, a man of determination and strength. Yet the left side of his lips twitched constantly, and there was a furtive stare in his eyes that suggested fear.

I paid the driver, who, still in silence, handed out my grip-sack, then whirled the car around in the center of the street and raced off in the direction from which he had come.

"There are two roads," Trenard said abruptly, after the driver had gone, "one skirting the lake and a shorter one through the woods. Which do you prefer?"

"There is a lake, then?" I asked, remembering the queer remark of the driver.

For a moment Trenard made no answer. He stared straight ahead of him and walked forward a couple of paces. "A lake, yes," he said slowly. "A lake of hell!"

Needless to say, this cabalistic statement set my brain in turmoil again, and I could find no words for reply. We reached the edge of town and entered the remnants of an old logging road, merely two ruts in most places, necessitating my walking on one side and Trenard four feet away on the other. The man gave no indication of commencing that conversation which he had declared the march to his house would permit, and we paced along in silence.

It was quite dark now, the way before us walled in by two lines of towering trees. Up above, thick velvet clouds swept across the low-hanging sky, but off to the east, a growing circle of radiance showed where the moon was trying to break through.

As the man continued to say nothing and I could think of nothing worthy of disturbing his study, I fell into a deep thought myself, musing on all his colorful history which had so intrigued the world a year before.

Here, then, was the leader of that epoch-making Trenard-Fielding expedition, which, in the face of all scientific ridicule, had discovered off the coast of British North Borneo, the remnants of a hitherto unknown civilization; the unchronicled, unfabled city of Dras. I remembered the lengthy newspaper accounts that had been devoted to the finding of the submerged

tity and the queer artifacts brought back to New York.

Down there on the sea floor, Trenard had walked the streets of a city buried under water for centuries. He had found marble buildings, architecture unaffected by Roman or Arab invasion, statues of deities of a distinct and separate religion, and carven hieroglyphics that were as yet undecipherable. It was indeed a success.

But Fielding had not fared so well. His sudden death had been a shock to the entire country, and especially to his colleagues back in the University of Virginia. There were queer rumors about his being killed by some unseen sea monster which lurked there in the depths, rumors that had been partially verified by other members of the expedition, but in all cases stoutly denied by Trenard.

In the exact center of the water-covered city, according to Trenard's popular book, *The Mysteries of Sunken Dras*, which I had browsed through, he had found a large mausoleum where apparently were entombed the five kings of the last dynasty. And for some reason, Trenard had been so taken up by either the architectural beauty or the regal associations of this edifice, that he had raised it to the surface, segment by segment, and shipped it back to the United States. It was a tremendous undertaking, involving the use of costly derricks and equipment and endangering the lives of the men. Why Trenard should have chosen this one building to raise rather than the many others, and why indeed he should have sacrificed further exploration and the removal of other objects to raise any at all, was, to the popular mind, a mystery.

It was said, of course, that the touch of fever, which had delayed him for three weeks at Kuching on the west coast of Borneo, had left his mind unbalanced. It was said also that the radiogram which had come to him out there in the Java sea, telling of the sudden death of his sister, Sylvia, had left him half mad and brought about a strange obsession.

At any rate, Trenard had taken the mausoleum back with him to New York. Then, at further expense, he had conveyed it by train and motor truck to his wilderness home near the town of Flume. That was a year ago.

Flume at that time was only a monument of past industry. Only some seventy-five persons remained in the village. But I had heard or read somewhere that three months after the mausoleum had been set up in the town's cemetery and the body of his deceased sister, Sylvia, entombed in it, every one of those seventy-five had packed up and left en masse.

CHAPTER II

"The Mysteries of Sunken Dras"

● My reverie suddenly came to an end, when Trenard, grasping my arm and speaking for the first time in many moments, said:

"The road forks here. Let us take the wood path. The lake road is considerably longer."

I nodded in agreement, and increased my pace to keep up with him. Abruptly, the way before us opened upon a large glade, and there, fifty yards ahead, loomed the walls of a huge, oblong house. I stared at it coldly. Even in the half-darkness, the simple, the severe style of its architecture was apparent. The building, though frame, had not the slightest suggestion of gable or ornamentation, and rose straight up and across like an enormous packing case.

Trenard led the way to a small door, unlatched it with a key, and ushered me inside.

To an interior decorator, I presume, that chamber would have appealed as being furnished in good taste. But to me, depressed already by the somberness of my passage through the September woods, it seemed even more austere than the building's outside.

The white walls ran up two stories to an arched ceiling of a sickly-hued blue. On the side opposite me, half-way up, extended a small gallery swerving out over the room in a wide curve and terminating in a steep staircase, the balustrade fashioned of polished silver. There was a white porcelain bookcase in one corner, and on

its top stood two curious ebony figures. One was in the likeness of a large deep-sea fish, with huge scales and a bloated middle portion. The other, complete in every detail, was a carving of a diver with helmet and full equipment. All in all, the room gave the impression of utter coldness, and my eyes moved from side to side, searching for a bit of red or brown to break the frigid monotony.

Trenard had removed his hat and coat now. He moved toward a connecting door, saying:

"Make yourself comfortable for a few moments, Arnold. I'll get you a little refreshment. I have no servants. I've lived here alone since the death of my sister, you know."

Before I could explain that I had eaten heartily in Pine Island, he had gone, and I was left to my thoughts.

I stood there a moment musing over the strange ways a man's ornamental fancies will manifest themselves. Then, lighting a cigarette, I tossed my hat and coat to a chair and strolled over to the bookcase. There were the volumes I had expected to find; atlases, travel accounts, texts on deep-sea diving, Wallace's *Malay Archipelago*, and one or two technical works on ancient civilizations. But my attention was attracted abruptly from the book-shelves to a large framed picture hanging on the white wall.

It was an enlarged photograph, a scene taken under water by a submerged camera. It presented, I realized instantly, a street view of the sunken city of Dras. Vaguely, through the blur of the water and under the glare of what apparently was the submarine's beam light, had been snapped a formless mass of ornate buildings, shadowy columns and capitals. It was indistinct, yet that very lack of line and boundary increased its mystery and appeal. In the foreground could be distinguished a school of fish, and at a point in the rear, above the city, hung a black shapeless mass, which apparently had failed to register in the lens of the camera.

Toward this latter object I suddenly found my gaze attracted. For an instant I stood there wondering what could have caused this blotch on an otherwise almost incredibly perfect photograph. Then slowly there came a singular sensation that my eyes were being held in focus, that another will stronger than my own would not permit them to turn away. It was inexplicable, that feeling. It seemed as though some hidden eye were looking from beneath that discoloration on the print, gazing at me with the controlling stare of a hypnotist.

A moment later, I thought that formless shadow had begun to move—to creep slowly toward me with the sluggish wavering movement of a heavy body in deep water.

● Heavy steps and a slamming door broke the spell abruptly, and I turned to meet Trenard approaching with a tray of china. He sat across from me, lit an old meerschaum pipe and proceeded to lose himself amid clouds of tobacco smoke.

"Mr. Trenard," I said at length, my repast finished, "if we can agree on one subject, that of price, I believe my business may be concluded here with as little trouble and as quickly as possible. We have found a potential purchaser of your property. You must realize, however, that because of the inconveniences caused by the abandonment of the town of Flume, you cannot command a very high price."

He seemed noticeably relieved at this information, and laying aside his pipe, replied quickly:

"Then I will accept the offer, whatever it is. I've got to get away from here, and I can't do it until I've realized the money invested on the property."

I nodded, puzzled at his marked vehemence. "My company will live up to its reputation of fairness," I assured him. "As your agent, we will ask only the customary commission for finding a purchaser and completing the transaction. Shall we draw up the papers now, then, and I will leave in the morning?"

"The papers can wait," Trenard replied. "It will be easier to write by daylight. And if you will pardon me, I am in the custom of retiring early. You may stay here and read, if you like. Your room is reached by

the staircase and is the second door to the right."

I nodded silently and watched him as he climbed the staircase with my grip-sack and disappeared somewhere in the darkness of the gallery above. Again he was either thoughtless, disturbed or characteristically impolite, for he made no offer to bid me good-night.

After my refreshment, the profound weariness which had so dulled me since my arrival in Pine Island had gradually left, and I now experienced no desire for sleep. I picked up a leather-bound copy of Trenard's book, *The Mysteries of Sunken Dras*, and absently opened it. A clock ticked slowly, steadily, somewhere, as I glanced at random through the pages. Presently I came to several passages which had been underlined with pencil, and before them my eyes hesitated long enough to read:

"A careful study of the hieroglyphics on the tomb has led me to the belief that the inhabitants of Dras had reached an intelligence considerably higher than the average observer would gather by merely examining the artifacts brought to the surface. I am of the opinion that the scholars and wise men at the courts of the five kings of the last dynasty had probed to a remarkable degree the most profound depths of abstract mathematical calculation and theoretical physics."

And again:

"The Drasian theology seems to have been an unexplainable combination of the vilest forms of demonology and a scientific concept of the relation between time and space, or to be exact, a religious intellection based on the belief that the four-dimensional continuum, as we would term it today, is teeming with gargoyle horrors, the foulness of which the finite mind cannot even conceive. In this respect, I am almost led to believe that Einstein was crudely antedated thousands of years."

Dry and bookish as these statements were, I gave them considerable thought. Toward the end of the volume, thrust in the pages, I came upon a scrap of paper covered with penciled writing. Let me say that ordinarily I am not addicted to reading other people's personal notations, but almost before I realized it, I was staring at the following:

"Can it be possible that the mausoleum's space interior itself constitutes a disruption of the space-time coordinates, a channel, so to speak, an opening formed in some unknown way by the priests of Dras which leads from our own three dimensional world into the fourth dimension? It is a thought which seems unbelievable. Yet the strange tales the villagers told and their frantic exodus from Flume would confirm it. Surely Fielding's story which he told before he went down the last time was untrue. But even if true, it would be mad to think it has followed me and is out there now—out there, God forbid, with poor Sylvia. What does it all mean?

"Today, one of the forest rangers from the district north of here passed through and confirmed what I had already guessed to be true. The government-made dike constructed to keep Opal Lake at its level on the north shore has been wearing away, and there is danger of inundation. How high the water will rise if it breaks through, I can't imagine. But I must get away from here. I shall go mad if I stay."

CHAPTER III

Into the Swamp

● I sat back and stared at these enigmatic lines, frowning. Undoubtedly it was Trenard's handwriting, but what, in the note's own words, did it all mean?

At length, shrugging, I closed the book, tossed it to the table, and rose to my feet. There was a small half-sized door just before me, and if nothing else, it offered a way out of my thoughts. I longed to get out of the room. It's cold, white walls, blue ceiling and bleak furnishings produced in me that same sense of cheerlessness one finds in the interior of a hospital. I opened the door and stepped out under the night sky.

It was a small balcony that extended over the rear of the house. Even as I walked to the edge of the railing, the moon suddenly

broke through a last rift of clouds, and I saw below me, like a sheath of ribbed silver, a long and narrow lake, the water swashing against the bushes almost at the building's foundation, the farther shores hidden by an intervening fringe of trees. Straight ahead, the gently rising surface was unbroken, but off to the left, toward the abandoned town of Flume, the water was dotted with orderly rows of white objects, which at that distance appeared to be pieces of anchored chalk. Farther on huddled a heavy shadow, the outlines of some huge building.

For a moment, I stood there musing. Then, as my eyes were drawn once again to those rows of white things, a little thrill of understanding swept through me.

The driver who had brought me from Pine Island had been right. This wasn't a lake. Those even files of white blocks were —tombstones! Tombstones, and the expanse of water before me must be a development of recent months, an inundated graveyard. The dike on Opal Lake's northern shore had finally worn away; and the water, seeking its own level, had flowed here, flooding without respect the last resting-place of Flume's dead.

Looking directly below me now, I saw half in the moonlight, half in the shadow, a small flat-bottom duck-boat, drawn up on the bush-lined shore. Why, indeed, my host should have wished to row out on such a body of water struck me as most singular. And yet, as I gazed at the little craft and the short stubby oars thrown carelessly beside it, there came a distinct impulse that I myself go out on the moonlit water. I debated a moment, then lifting myself over the railing, dropped the short distance to the ground below. There was a certain macabre attraction to the scene before me.

Five seconds later I had adjusted the oars in the locks and shoved the boat gently into the lapping waves. Without knowing why, I headed due east, following the line of the shore. The moon, though high in the indigo heavens, seemed strangely bloated and out of proportion. As I rowed farther and farther, the white blank wall that marked Trenard's house fell back deeper into the gloom of foliage and looked out at me like an eyeless face swathed in a cowl. At intervals, I rested my oars across the thwart and sat surveying the scene.

● Presently I was in that part of the lake that was directly over the old graveyard, and looking over my shoulder, I could see, some distance ahead, Trenard's mausoleum. There, within its ancient walls, was entombed the man's sister, Sylvia, buried in a monument that had once held the five kings of Dras. I pulled harder on my left oar and headed toward it.

The lake was even narrower here, the banks close, and I could see row on row of white tombstones and tilting crosses rising above the water. Waves swashed against them in a low liquid dirge. The water, too, seemed clearer than that fronting Trenard's house. Looking down over the boat's gunwales, I thought I saw more gravestones and crosses far below in the dark depths, gleaming white like scattered mounds of bleached bones.

Then the shadowy mass of the mausoleum rose like a curtain before me. To a general appearance, the architecture might be classed as Oriental, the domed roof rising gracefully like a Mohammedan mosque. Above the doorway, a hideous gargoyle perched on a block of stone.

I dipped my oars and brought the boat around to the other side, dark there with the shadow of the hidden moonlight, but still revealing a small iron-barred window that had been cut through the wall. With the boat bobbing close to the stone side, I steadied myself, reached up and strove to see into the interior.

My curiosity was disappointed. I saw nothing. Only a well of blackness met my eyes. For a moment, I remained in that perilous position, staring between the bars. And then—my head jerked back with revulsion.

Sweeping to my nostrils from the inner recesses of that vault had come a horrible fetid smell, a loathsome odor of unutterable filth. It surged out upon me like a putres-

cent blanket of green mold, gagging my throat and larynx.

I clung there retching and gasping. For an instant, there was only silence and that festering breath. Then, without warning, there came from within those walls a prolonged hiss like escaping steam and a heavy sluggish splashing in the interior water. Something cold and clammy slid across my hands clenched there on the iron bars, and I whipped them away dripping with blood, gashed to the bone.

I did not cry out: only dropped back into the boat and began to row furiously for the shore. I worked the paddles with might and main until my shoulders ached in their sockets. My heart pounded like a runner's.

Back in my own room in Trenard's house, I sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at my hands. Both were marked with deep ragged gashes between the wrist and first knuckle. Blood gushed from the wounds dyed the fingers crimson.

Confused, bewildered, I poured a quantity of water and carefully bathed the injured members. Then, utilizing the little first-aid kit I always carry in my grip-sack, I carefully bathed the gashes in iodine, then applied gauze and adhesive tape.

How long I lay there awake, I cannot tell. My brain was whirling round and round, seeking an answer to it all. But at length I lapsed into a fitful slumber.

The rumble of thunder was in my ears when I awoke. Rain was slashing the pane of my bedroom window, and in the early morning gloom, a wall of trees, just beyond, were bending double in the face of a raging wind.

I jumped to my feet with an exclamation. Bad weather meant bad roads, and considering the disrepair of the Flume-Pine Island trail, this unexpected storm might cause an enforced stay in Trenard's house, an outlook which, as I considered it, rose to appalling proportions.

Dressed, I made my way downstairs to find my worst fears realized. The rain was slanting down in torrents, and the path that led across the glade into the woods was a swirling river of mud and water.

The little door leading to the balcony that faced the lake was open, and stepping to the sill, I paused and looked out.

Julian Trenard was standing at the railing, staring out ahead of him at the foaming lake. He was drenched to the skin, and the water was running down his face in tiny rivulets. Suddenly he became aware of my presence, whirled around and stepped back into the room. I watched him as he moved to a chair and sank into it with a low moan.

"Arnold," he said, "have you ever gone into the theory of relativity? Do you know anything of the principles of space-time, of the fourth dimension? Do you believe there are other worlds around us, worlds which, because of our limited three-dimensional senses, we cannot see or understand?"

I took out a cigarette, lit it twice before I made my reply.

"Yes, of course," I said. "I'm not so strong on my science, but I've read the usual articles. Why?"

The nerve near Trenard's mouth was twitching violently now. He got up, paced to the farther wall and back again, then hesitated before me, leaning hard on the table top.

"And do you believe it to be true that in that other fourth dimensional world there exist forms of life entirely removed from our own evolutionary scale, creatures horrible beyond the farthest reaches of our imagination? Do you believe that?"

"Who knows?" I replied. "It's logical, I suppose. But the unknown is always popularly embodied with strange terrors. So far we have only a tangle of mathematical calculations to go by."

He turned away without listening, and as I looked after him curiously, I thought I saw his lips form the words over and over again: "Oh Sylvia, Sylvia!"

● Both breakfast and the subsequent business formalities were dismal affairs. The storm, instead of dying down, grew steadily in fury, and we sat in that cheerless room with the thunder hammering overhead, and the wind rushing by the outer walls with

the screams of a frightened child. Noon came and passed, with Trenard making no suggestion of a lunch. Curiously enough, the man had not seemed to notice the fact that both my hands were thickly bound in bandages; or if he did, he asked no questions about them. The wounds, incidentally, were causing me constant worry. Though I had not inspected them since the night before, they felt hot and feverish, and an unpleasant sensation of a pulse, beating deep in the gashes, made me resolve to visit a doctor immediately upon my return to Boston. But the unexplainable events, of which those hurts were a climax, I deliberately thrust from my mind. That was something I could not think of without trembling in horror.

Abruptly at five o'clock the rain and the wind came to an end, and there was left only an occasional sullen delayed burst of thunder. The storm had passed on.

With the quieting of the elements, Trenard suddenly roused himself into action. A tremor seemed to pass through him from head to foot, and he called softly:

"I'm coming, Sylvia. I'll take you away."

He ran madly across the room, flung open the outer door and disappeared. Moments dragged by as I stood looking after him. Had the man reached the climax of some mental malady? Were his queer actions, his apparent obsession, the result of a diseased brain?

An instant I waited in indecision. Then as the cold gloominess of that room slowly gathered around me, I strode to the door and followed him. His footprints were embedded there in the wet loam, and slowly, half held back by some inner dread, I traced them around the outer wall of the house. At first I thought he was making for the little duck-boat I had used the night before, but the trail led farther on, through a dense thicket, down into a low marshy section of land, and finally to the edge of the lake.

I drew up behind the bole of a tree and peered ahead of me. Trenard was there, up to his knees in water, dragging a huge flat-bottomed barge to the shore from its anchoring buoy. Along the strip of beach stood seven steel drums, black barrels of apparently fifty gallon capacity. I could not even guess at their contents.

As I watched, Trenard began to roll the barrels one by one onto the barge. They were terrifically heavy, it seemed, the man apparently using every ounce of his strength in the task. The barge itself was a strange affair. Half raft, half boat, it was made of untrimmed logs, bound together with wire and rope of every size and description.

Puzzled, unable to understand his actions, I kept in the protective shadow of the tree and watched the work slowly being completed. Trenard was laboring like a madman now. Sweat was streaming from his forehead. He had thrown off his coat, and hatless, his hair hung wildly over his eyes.

At length, the last barrel was moved from the beach to the barge. Without a glance behind, Trenard leaped aboard, seized a long wooden staff, and began poling out into the lake. Fifty feet from the shore the depth became too great for the use of the pole, and he discarded it for a crude, square-bladed paddle arrangement which he operated from a socket in the bow.

For a long while, I watched him as he worked the clumsy craft slowly into the upper reaches of the lake. Then, when an intervening fringe of trees hid him from sight, I turned, ran back to the little duck-boat, threw in the oars, and shoved off in pursuit. Curiosity once more had gotten the better of me.

CHAPTER IV

Encounter with the Dimensional Horror

● The lake lay as flat and motionless as a great mirror, and the tombstones ahead seemed only lighter reflections of the leaden sky. Ahead, the domed mausoleum reared itself above the colorless water like some ugly sprawling beetle.

But Trenard did not steer directly for the tomb. Carefully, as one proceeding under a long premeditated plan, he maneuvered the barge to a point some forty or fifty feet from the vault's entrance, and

there, halting his paddling, seized one of the steel barrels and rolled it to the boat's edge. Gradually lessening the intervening space, I rowed my own craft parallel to the bank, watching him.

He had resumed his paddling again now, moving slowly forward with that one barrel still lying at the edge of the barge, almost touching the water. From that barrel a dark heavy liquid was pouring onto the lake, coloring the surface with a gleaming purple black, thickening in an ever-widening circle.

It was oil! No other fluid would act in like manner when in contact with water.

Round and round the mausoleum Trenard directed the barge. I was quite near now, and I could see the mingled expression of fear and determination in the man's face; the wild stare in his black eyes. Back and forth he worked the enormous socket paddle, and in his wake grew a steadily widening trail of oil. When the steel drum was emptied, Trenard shoved it into the water and rolled another into position. And thus he repeated the process, circumnavigating the tomb again and again until the surface of the lake was black with petroleum.

At length, the contents of the seven barrels were emptied, and Trenard headed for the vault entrance. He lashed the mooring-rope around one of the narrow stone columns, leaped out, and waded over the water-covered stairs to the door. A moment later I heard the iron barrier clang open and saw him disappear into the interior.

Five minutes passed, an eternity with only the gentle lapping of the water on the surrounding masonry. Then, as I leaned over the gunwale watching, Trenard reappeared, and I started as if struck by a blow. From the entrance of the vault he was dragging a heavy, oblong shape, struggling to slide it onto the barge. A black wooden box, it was . . . . . a coffin . . . . . the carved and ornamented casket of his sister, Sylvia.

But something was wrong. The man was making frantic efforts to close the iron door behind him. He was straining backward, arms bent double, exerting all his strength to force it into position. There was but a foot separating it from the latch, yet some interior force seemed holding it open.

Suddenly Trenard threw back his hands and uttered a shriek of horror. He released the door and with one wild lunge threw himself onto the barge, unfastened the mooring rope and seized the paddle arm. Back and forth he shot the blade, churning through the thick water. The clumsy craft began to move slowly away from the tomb.

And then—I can only chronicle the events that followed from the nightmare train of horror images that remain engraved on my mind. From the entrance of the domed mausoleum there emerged a thing which sent a wave of terror streaking down my spine.

It was utterly bestial. It was a sight so indescribably loathsome and repulsive that it held me there in the boat, rigid and unable to believe my eyes, doubting my very sanity.

● Creeping over the water-covered steps, past the carved columns, came a huge, bloated, semi-saurian monster, a giant sea serpent, an enormous water reptile, and yet a creature with eight jointed, hairy spider-legs like some hybrid insect from the canvas of the mad August Schlegel. The body, sliding endlessly from the inner recesses of the vault, was a gleaming, lubricous black, the head, a flat, pointed, featureless mass. As I stared out upon it and a great nausea rose up within me, I subconsciously catalogued it, in spite of those hairy spider-like appendages, as something akin to a Mosasaur, the giant sea snake that infested the prehistoric seas of the later Mesozoic. And yet, though I am neither biologist nor student of paleontology, though I have never, beyond casual browsing, delved into the little-known subject of deep-pressure marine life, I knew it to be no naturally evolved form of life of my own mundane world.

Head and three long undulations above the surface, jaws dripping slaver, it poised

there, then suddenly lunged straight at Trenard. Again the man screamed, and the cry shot over the lake, wailing to the farthest shore. He was working like a madman at the socket oar now, churning the oily water in great foaming waves, and the barge, with the coffin in its center, moved sluggishly forward.

And as I sat, transfixed, in the boat, I thought I understood. The interior of that mausoleum, where once had been entombed the five kings of Dras, constituted a channel, an opening in space, formed in some strange way by the priests of that ancient city, leading from our own three-dimensional world to that of the fourth dimension. When Trenard had raised the tomb to the surface from the sea-floor, transported it here to the Flume cemetery, the passage through space-time had not disturbed that opening. It still existed in the vault's interior, a door to the world beyond.

Good God! Now I saw the reason for Trenard's actions. He had guessed all this too, long before. He had lived a life of constant growing dread in his lonely home, and had gradually become obsessed with the horrible thought that the body of his sister, Sylvia, was out there with the monster, that her unprotected coffin was within the thing's reach. Was not death in our plane but a process of transmutation, of metempsychosis into another world? And would not that ghastly creature drag her into a pit of deepest corruption where she would be imprisoned forever?

The huge thing, body glistening with slime, hairy appendages slowly treading water, was moving forward in pursuit of the barge. And Trenard was struggling at the socket oar, casting frantic glances behind him.

It was a death race, an impossible combat between a supernormal entity from another plane and a man crazed with fear. On swept the barge, the square prow turning the oily surface of the lake into a river of creaming ink. Behind, and scattered at intervals near the mausoleum, floated the seven empty steel drums, half submerged, like so many black porpoises drifting in uninterested sleep. Off on the southern shore a blue jay sent its sharp cry of reality into the heavy air.

For a moment I closed my eyes, telling myself that when I opened them again I would find it had all been some horrible dream. So much, and no more will the human brain receive that is utterly alien. But when I again looked upon that monstrosity coiling through the water before me, a wave of terror swept through me from head to foot.

Scarcely ten yards apart, they were now, and even from where I sat in the duck-boat, I could see the veins on Trenard's brow extend, as he worked the huge paddle, like taut wire. Mercifully, perhaps, the occurances of the next few instants have been blurred in my memory in a hideous maelstrom of confusion. I have, however, a nightmare recollection of leaping to my feet, the impact almost swamping the duck-boat, and screaming one wild scream:

● "Trenard! Trenard! . . . . Oh, My God!"

There it was, poised on the surface of the lake, a thing to be compared with no mundane standards, a creation from the inner reaches of a geometric hell, python body stretched flat downward now, hairy spider-legs motionless. Then, with a hiss, it closed in on him.

Trenard had only an instant, a single split fraction of time. With a leap, he whirled away from the arm of the socket paddle and clawed madly at his pockets. His hands brought forth something I could not recognize. I saw him fumble with it, open it, and extract something from its interior. Once, twice, he moved his fingers in frantic jerks. Then a pin-point of orange flame flared up, and with a start I understood.

Matches! Trenard meant to ignite the heavy film of oil that covered the surface of the water. He had planned this carefully as the one and only means of self-preservation. Now he turned the flame of the match to the box itself and flung the flaming missile out before him. Then with a scream, he looked over his shoulder.

The thing was upon him, foul head lunging over the edge of the barge, hissing in diabolical fury. By sheer force, Trenard seemed to wrench himself from the hypnotic stare of those black, hyalescent eyes. He lurched to the opposite end of the barge and flung himself wide and clear into the thick water.

Even as his body momentarily disappeared beneath the surface, a wall of flame shot up over the spot, raced toward the monster and the barge, mounting with the rapidity of an inferno.

I can tell little more. Stricken dumb, held motionless there, amid the swashing tombstones, I saw the whole tableau before me transform on the instant into a roaring cauldron of madness. There came a violent lashing and floundering as the monster found itself caught in the center of it. One after another, seven times in succession, I saw the spider-legs burst into flame, curl and shrivel like burning rope and finally drop off. Up from the cremating body rose a thick, greenish miasma, sickening with the stench of burning putrefaction.

The lake was singing with flame now. Red reflections stabbed deep into the water depths. The barge and its coffin cargo were a raging holocaust, a floating funeral pyre swiftly being consumed. Of Trenard, there was no sign. Only flaming oil, leaping higher and higher, swirled over the spot where he had disappeared. Abruptly, a dense billow of black smoke, heavy as felt, belched upward and hid it all in a thick pungent curtain.

But I had no wish to see more. I seized the oars of the duck-boat and rowed madly to the beach. Five feet from the shore I leaped into the water and ran: ran wildly —through the dripping woods, down the old logging road and into the abandoned town of Flume.

● To this day, my passage from the lake across the long tortuous miles to Pine Island remains a blank spot in the record of my memory. There is but a single instant during the endless hours of that advance which I can recall with any degree of clarity, a moment when I reached a higher, open point on the old road and looked out upon a scene that probed its gloom into the lowest reaches of my soul.

The lowering sky was deepening into dusk, and the wilderness stretched below me, a dark carpet of undulating green. In its center, like a leaden wedge, lay the elliptical expanse of that lake. Off to the side brooded a heavier shadow, which I knew to be the Dras mausoleum, and over all, from shore to shore, hung a slowly diminishing cloud of smoke.

THE END

What Is Your Knowledge of Science?

Test Yourself By This Questionnaire

1. What are infra-red rays? (Page 299)
2. Where is the Magnetic Pole? (Page 367)
3. What is the Magnetic Pole believed to be? (Page 370)
4. When did mammoths live upon the earth? (Page 376)
5. What are the properties of ultra-violet rays? (Page 387)
6. What is Einstein's theory of visible and immovable space? (Page 406)
7. According to this theory, how fast is visible space traveling? (Page 406)
8. In what star cluster is Alcyone? (Page 408)
9. What is Ganymede? (Page 408)
10. Can palmistry be called a science? (Page 409)

(Illustration by Paul)

I was running hard now . . . . for the mech-men were close upon me!

THE CALL OF THE MECH-MEN

By
LAURENCE MANNING

● Another unsolved scientific mystery is the reason for the location of the magnetic pole in northern Canada. Why is it there, and not at the North Pole, or somewhere else? There is nothing in geology to explain it, although there are several theories.

Many authors have taken scientific facts—such as passing comets, the meteor-craters in Arizona and Siberia, and the discovery of Pluto—and have written science fiction stories in explanation. However, we have never before read a tale which gave a fictional answer for the reason of the location of the magnetic pole.

You will find Mr. Manning's answer to the problem highly entertaining, and not as improbable as some stories of this type. A story worth re-reading.

● Up on West 53rd Street, amid a row of converted brownstone fronts is a club called the Stranger Club. It hasn't a sign, and even if you were to find the right door, you could push the bell for hours on end without result. It doesn't ring, for it was never connected. And if it did ring, no one would dream of opening the door to you. You must have a key to enter: from which you might gather that the Stranger Club does not welcome strangers, and in this deduction you would not be wrong. My friend Seeman provided my entrance there. He is a little mouse of a man, with a deathly still face covered with fever-yellowed parchment, and a voice like a meek grocery clerk's. His unbelievable occupation is hunting for prospecting expeditions in Africa and (I understand) cannibal tribes over there call him the African equivalent of Sudden Death and keep out of rifle shot. Seeman spends a month in New York every two or three years, and left shortly after he arranged my membership. How *he* was allowed to enter, I cannot imagine, nor do I yet understand why I was admitted.

You see, this club has a particular purpose for existing. The meaning of its name is obvious upon entering the place. The door opens upon a large hall from which branch off three huge rooms. Close to the ceiling along the hall in large letters, runs this motto:—TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.

Of the three rooms, one is a small dining room with kitchen and pantry attached; across the hall from this is a library of some two thousand volumes set about with comfortable leather chairs and quiet lights. The third and central room is a huge lounge with hunting trophies, weapons and similar odds and ends set about on the walls. In this room is the great fireplace around which in winter, I am told, tales of sorts may be heard, with all lights out and the fire glow flickering. I have yet to experience that, for I have only been a member for the past two months.

One particularly hot day last week, I abandoned the last flimsy pretense at work and went up to the Club. Colonel Marsh was there, and a tall frosty julep beside him, which the attendant had just brought in. He silently raised his eyebrows when he saw me, and then (without speaking a word) raised two fingers, at which sign the waiter nodded and hurried away. By the time, I had slumped moistly into a chair, a second cool julep rested on the table at my right hand. We sipped in silence for some minutes. I was considering my companion thoughtfully. He could talk volubly,

if one set about priming him in the right way. And what he had to say was usually startling, for he was a much travelled man who took no one's word for anything, but went to see for himself—being wealthy and unattached.

But it was one thing to meet him and chat in company and quite another privately to loosen the flood-gates of his speech—watched over as they were by those pale blue and icy eyes, guarded by that sentinel peak of a nose and sealed in behind that bristly, tobacco-stained military moustache of his. One would think that these facial chaperons would never be mollified nor their severity softened, but I had found a way to make him talk. I had only to start telling him myself something which I suspected *he* might be able to tell me. Presently, signs of impatience would appear. A foot would tap. His hand would drum on the arm of his chair. His lusty red face would grow slightly apoplectic as if with ill-suppressed verbiage; until, all in all, it might seem that the man was going to blow up. It does not do to weaken then. Keep right on, though you fear death by violence, until his reticence can be maintained no longer and the man finds relief in a glass-shattering "Hr-r-rmph!"

That does it. Now you may sit back in your chair, light a pipe, and enjoy the fruit of your labors. Upon this summer's afternoon I felt like hearing him talk. I ventured an opinion on the temperature of New York as compared to that of Central Africa. But I drew a blank there. Then I mentioned something about the latest bank hold-up, but without striking fire. Rather discouraged, I found my conversational path through the cosmic ray controversy, by means of balloon travel to navigation and compass variations. And there I paused, for Marsh was interested—I could tell from the way his white bushy eyebrows twitched. I plowed on, then, shamelessly—through geographical variations to seasonal shifts of compass error and getting as many of my facts wrong as I could.

"One thing seems curious," I was saying, "and that is that the Magnetic Pole is but two thousand miles from New York—right up in northern Canada on the Boothia Peninsula. Yet, I may be wrong, but I don't recollect that any observatory or scientific station is located there. Now, modern theory on earthly magnetism is very fine—but I should think someone would want to go up and see if there may be some other explanation."

"Hr-r-rmph!" said Colonel Marsh.

I leaned back in my chair and mopped my forehead, prepared to listen.

"These modern scientific puppies!"

I assented with a deprecating gesture.

"You *would* think they'd go and look at a thing when it's so easy to do, wouldn't you? Not they! Couldn't persuade them to go near the place! Tried hard enough, too!"

He plunged his heated countenance into the frosty glass and the liquid seemed to hiss at the contact. "You see," said Colonel Marsh, wiping his moustache between thumb and forefinger, "I happen to have been up there myself last month. You may remember that I was not at the club for ten days?"

"Wait a moment," I put in doubtfully. "Are you talking about the Magnetic North Pole? You went there and back in ten days?"

"Tut, man! What's a mere two thousand miles in days like these? A mere fifteen hours in a fast airplane! Wonderful days we live in!" He drained his drink and beckoned for another with a long and lively finger, "I'd been sitting in this very chair one morning and reading the paper, when I came across one of those advertisements from a Long Island flying field—you've seen them no doubt? This one offered an air-taxi to any place at the rate of fifty cents a mile. It struck me at once that the offer was interesting and I secured an atlas, and I immediately knew I wanted to investigate the Magnetic Pole, so I phoned the flying field.

"'I understand,' I said, 'that you offer to take a man anywhere at fifty cents a mile.'

"'That's right,' answered a voice—then after a second's pause, 'but not transatlantic flights! Ha ha!'

"'I hadn't planned crossing the Atlantic. I do not wish to leave this continent.'

"'Where did you wish to go?'

"'You get a plane ready for a week's cruise, and I'll leave in an hour,' I replied.

"Well, when I got to the field with my luggage, the pilot made the most fussy kind of objections to my trip. First, he claimed it wasn't on the continent, but I soon showed him by the map that it was. Then he claimed he couldn't take along enough gasoline for a round trip, so I wired the Imperial Oil Company at Ottawa and arranged to have two hundred gallons in five-gallon tins left for us along the shore of Hudson Bay as far north as possible and received an answer in half an hour that a plane was then leaving and would drop the gasoline just north of James Bay at the mouth of a little river there. In the meantime, I heard nothing but objections from the pilot—lazy beggar with no spirit of enterprise—talked a lot about risks and fool chances, but I stopped him promptly by waving his own advertisement in front of his nose. 'Is this statement correct?' I asked, 'Or are you just another boaster who can't live up to his claims?'

"That got under his skin, and his face turned red. Then the telegram came back from Ottawa, and he shrugged his shoulders, fumbled around in a trouser pocket, and pulled out a little white ivory elephant, which he rubbed with his palm.

"'All aboard,' he said, and we started.

"It was eight in the evening, by then; a fine clear night with the sun setting behind the Jersey hills, and the lights of New York just beginning to show bright beneath us. The ship was a six-place amphibian, with the pilot in a screened off compartment in front. I sat up with him a few minutes and noticed that he had a huge sheaf of charts and maps and seemed to know where he was going. But I felt somehow that he preferred to be alone, so I went back aft and made a couch, of sorts, in one of the seats. I slept soundly until a faint, grey dawn woke me, and a glance at my wrist watch showed four in the morning. We should be due at our gasoline cache in an hour or less. I glanced over the side and saw a low, flat wilderness stretching away out of sight on the horizon. I crossed the cabin and looked out of the right-hand windows to see a body of water a few miles to the right—James Bay I imagined.

● "We had taken on a good substantial supply of food and drink, and when I opened a thermos bottle of hot coffee and mixed it with brandy, I went forward to the pilot. He drank with one hand at the wheel and smacked his lips appreciatively, and I think, began to take an interest in the trip for the first time. His name was Stanley, I learned, and according to his charts, we should be almost at the river's mouth, but he didn't really expect to be able to find it, I'm sure. As we were talking, I caught a flash of reflected sunlight (for dawn was breaking rapidly) far to the right, and Stanley circled around and down. There—plain to be seen—were our cans of gasoline. We were over the shore by then, and came down to an easy landing in smooth water not fifty yards from land.

"Stanley was exhausted after his night's work, and beached the ship before he went to sleep in the cabin. I had no time to waste, so I set to work to refill the tank, and no little job it was. Twenty five-gallon cans had to be poured into them. It required five minutes to walk over to the pile and roll each can up to the ship, and a minute or two to empty it. I must have been hard at it for six or seven hours, with the black flies, those damned scourges of the North, hounding me constantly. By noon, I was worn out myself, and dropped into a cabin chair with a grunt that woke Stanley. We had lunch and two whiskey sodas, and by that time, Stanley was fully prepared to resume the flight.

"'We have about seven hours to fly,' said he. 'That will get us there just at dark.'

"Always objecting, you see, but I had him that time. 'It's July,' I answered 'and there's twenty-four hours of daylight where we're going.'

"He stared a minute. 'That's so—never thought of it!'

"He spent ten minutes fussing about with his charts and compass. Then we both pushed the ship off shore and headed her

into the wind. The twin motors roared once more, and we took off handily. We followed the coast—a flat muddy line without trees—hour after hour, and I wandered aft and sat down (as I thought) for a few minutes. But the sound and shake of flying is a very drowsy thing, and I awoke six hours later, and started forward to see if Stanley knew where he was going. He did, all right. He was gazing fascinated at his compass which swung crazily around in circles. His declination compass was standing on end with the North point pressed down toward the floor of the cabin. The Magnetic Pole was somewhere beneath us. But where? I had him cruise over and across several times, watching the compass all the while, and finally picked out the center of the magnetic disturbance to be a low hill—or not far from it. In that flat country, a landmark of any kind is a godsend, and down we settled. We landed at a good speed on a flat plain that looked as if it were made for our very purpose—but we had scarcely touched, when Stanley swore a bit and let out the throttle again. We pitched and careened a moment, and then broke clear. The flat plain had been tundra—marshy moss-covered bog. But we made our second landing at the foot of our little hill (it was not thirty feet in height) and Stanley shut off the engines and mopped his forehead.

"'I never thought I should really get you here,' he said. 'Now what do we do? Set up an American flag in a rock-cairn and cheer?'"

Colonel Marsh stroked his chin reflectively a moment. "Well," he said, "I suppose you are asking yourself the same question that Stanley asked. You might be wondering why I went to all this bother merely to set foot on the Magnetic Pole. You've read the theories, no doubt, and made up your mind that it's just a focal point for the earth's magnetic currents—oh, I know the story these scientific Johnnies who have never been there tell us! Now I'll let you know what was really in my mind. It had struck me as curious that there should be any spot on the face of the earth toward which every magnetized needle tends to point. When I see tracks in the mud I say to myself that something has walked there. When I see a compass swinging hard to the North I'm curious to know what can be attracting it there. So I determined to see for myself. It's all very well to sit back in a college easy chair and say there isn't anything there but an imaginary point. Catch *them* going all the way up north to where their compasses point! It's too fatiguing. But that doesn't do for *me*, sir, I can tell you!

"It had struck me—supposing someone put a signal up there to attract intelligent humans! Supposing I was *the first man with intelligence enough* to understand the compass signal and make the trip? It'd not be surprising, after all—what are you smiling at? . . . . of *course* the signal varies in direction. I'm coming to that in a minute."

"But," I interjected, "How could it vary as much as it does? The dip of the compass changes with the seasons and isn't the same in every part of the world and the direction itself isn't stable."

"Hr-r-rmph!" exploded the Colonel and I subsided.

"Theories! These college arm-chair theories! Why should the effect of a signal from the Magnetic Pole be the same everywhere? Is a radio signal equal in intensity from equal reception localities? Of course not. But why isn't it? Because of local reception conditions. It's precisely the same with our compasses."

I was silenced. After all, what he said was possible, and I was anxious, whether possible or not, to hear the story. But the worthy Colonel was not easily cooled, once his indignation was aroused.

"And look where the Magnetic Pole is," he continued warmly. "Hundreds and hundreds of miles from the true Pole around which the earth revolves. Have you ever been satisfied by the ordinary explanations of *that* fact?"

That put a more probable light on everything. As a matter of fact, I always thought it a little strange that the magnetic currents of the earth should be so lop-sided, as it were. I nodded interestedly.

"Hr-r-rmph!" said the Colonel, dismissing the interruption. "Where was I? Oh yes—we had landed the ship, right by the edge of the small rise of land, when you interrupted with your ignorant and uncivil objections. Not that they surprise me, mind! They are only a reflection of the great general ignorance prevalent among most of the world's inhabitants.

CHAPTER II

The Mech-Men

● "Well, as I was saying, we got out of the ship and stamped about on the ground, which was firm enough here. The sun was low on the western horizon, but did not sink any lower, though we watched hour after hour. I had brought a portable tent, and was unloading it when Stanley suggested that we might as well continue to live in the ship's cabin. He seemed to be quite curious about my purpose in coming at all—but I did not enlighten him. Instead, I removed my baggage—quite a pile—and from one very heavy valise, I unloaded the two hundred sticks of dynamite I had brought. At the sight of these explosives, Stanley's face was a picture of consternation, and he seemed to think it had been exceedingly foolhardy of me to have brought such a cargo. But as you will understand, it could hardly have exploded unless we had struck the ground suddenly or crashed—and if we had done either we should very likely have been killed instantly. I told him as much, but for some reason, he couldn't see it my way. He went up in the air about it, figuratively speaking, and carefully unpacked all of my belongings on the spot—opening and peering fearfully into everything, as though he expected to see a scorpion or a live cobra in each bag.

"Then he was more curious than ever as to what I wanted to use the dynamite for. I told him he would very soon see for himself. I had brought a very precise hand compass, and I cruised the surface of the earth for an hour or two and fixed the center of magnetic attraction within a hundred yards. Then I drove four stakes to bound the area, and suggested we retire for some sleep. He had been following me with his eyes popping out and let out a howl of disappointment at my words, but I climbed back into the cabin, and he followed, begging for enlightenment. By this time, the sun was swinging low around the north, and I finally fell asleep. When we arose, the sun was in the east, and rising slightly above the horizon. That was all the dawn amounted to up there.

"Stanley was sullenly silent by now, and even bacon and coffee did not thaw him out. 'If you will take the valise of dynamite and follow me,' said I, 'I'll show you what's in my mind.' And with that, I took a pick-axe I'd brought, and set off for my stakes, which were along the west slope of our mounded landmark. At each of the four stakes, I dug down a few feet and dropped in fifty sticks of dynamite. Then I filled the hole and pounded it tight. I connected the four mines by wires, and led a cable back to a portable battery near the ship, which was a good quarter of a mile away. When all was ready, I pulled the switch and the whole thing went off with a splendid bang. Stanley, who had not been expecting the explosion and had been inside the cabin doing something to the controls, came out like a Jack-in-the-box to see if I had hurt myself. He seemed almost disappointed that I had not. There was a great cloud of dust in the air, and some stones fell not far from us, but there was nothing dangerous. Stanley looked around to make sure that it was all over, and then took out his ivory luck-piece and began rubbing it unctuously. Together we approached the crater that my mines had made.

"It was four hundred feet across and fifty feet deep. At one side, near the small hill, there showed some white stone—bare and raw. I climbed down and examined this carefully, and you may well imagine my excitement when I tell you that it was plainly some sort of porcelain cement! Stanley came at once at my cry of surprise, and together we scratched and dug around it, but beyond coming to a smooth unbroken surface all about the piece we had chipped off, we found nothing. So we re-

turned to our supplies and brought tools, and for four solid hours we dug a trench, until we had bared a round white building roofed with a flat dome, and—finally—set in the wall, we found an arched doorway and fitted into that was a steel door about eight feet high and four across. We were so excited by then, that our hands were trembling. We scraped the door clean to every corner. There was not a mark upon it—no handle, not even a keyhole. And there we were!

"If we had had an oxygen blow torch, we might have cut our way in—but we had not brought any such equipment. It was a lesson to me, I can tell you, and I will never again set off upon an expedition without this piece of equipment. The only thing I could think of was to drop everything and return to civilization for more utensils. I had just about determined, in fact, to do this, when I heard a creaking noise. For a moment neither of us could place it—then Stanley pointed silently to the great metal door. It had come from behind that! It was the sort of squeal that metal makes upon metal when the surfaces have not been properly oiled. We stood, our hearts in our mouths, and watched the door slowly open —inch by inch. In the darkness beyond, a shape slowly took form to our light-accustomed eyes.

"It was a shiny metal box set upon three squat, jointed legs. At the top was a series of round glass bulbs, very heavy and thick, and the box on which these were set was two feet thick, and perhaps four feet high. A cable of overlapping rings—like the metal cable that covers electric wires when they run through joists and beams in buildings—projected from the very top, and trailed motionless upon the ground before us. In startled silence, we eyed this machine. Stanley shifted nervously upon his feet and cleared his throat.

" 'I don't like this,' he said hoarsely.

" 'If we could only squeeze past that machine. I can make out a passage beyond it,' I suggested.

" 'I'd sooner get the machine out of the way first,' he replied. 'Did you use all of your dynamite?'

" 'All but one stick.'

" 'That might be enough to blow that thing to pieces. What do you suppose it was set there for?'

"I did not reply. The two of us stood there in uneasy silence another moment. Then 'I'm going back for that dynamite,' Stanley said, and turned to go. What happened next was almost too quick for eyesight to follow. Like a flash of lightning, the steel cable stiffened out and whipped itself around him. With a terrible scream, Stanley was lifted bodily into the air and drawn swiftly inside and out of sight. What I saw had a horrible sort of fascination for me. But I turned away and made two steps toward safety, my feet seeming to be weighted down with lead—they moved so slowly. Then I felt a terrific constriction around my waist and I too was raised into the air and drawn into the mouth of that mysterious passage; flung down on the hard stone beside my companion. There was a clang as the door was shut, and we lay in complete darkness. I felt that chill cable feeling around me once more, and kicking and struggling, the two of us were lifted like dolls and flung on the top of the metal box. Then I felt myself carried along in the darkness in quick jolting strides. Minute after minute went by and seemed like hours. I could feel that we were being carried down a steep path—down into the darkest bowels of the earth. Stanley was hanging limp and unconscious. I could feel my senses slowly leaving me—I was hanging head down. I remembered no more.

● "It might have been minutes or hours later that I was jolted back to my senses. A faint glow of light came from somewhere in front of us, and I contrived to wriggle around (half breaking my back) to get my head uppermost. It ached abominably, and I was dizzy and sick, but fearfully desirous of seeing what was ahead of us. I made out a long tunnel in stone, with glistening smooth sides, and a brightness showed far ahead. In about five minutes, we arrived at the end of the passage and came into an enormous open space lit by a glow of light from overhead—like a sky of

phosphorus. It was similar to a sky in more senses than one, for it must have stretched a good half mile over our heads—it was not for a few minutes, in fact, that I realized we were in an underground world. But we were. Behind us rose the huge rock wall through which we had come, and before us, as far as the eye could see, stretched a flat-floored plain. Not a boulder or a tree, or even a clump of grass marred its perfect monotony, save only for strange towers of black rock that lifted up into the bright haze overhead. These I afterwards determined to be pillars supporting the vaulted roof of the cavern. They were fully fifty feet thick and spaced at least a quarter of a mile apart. The effect was weird and unearthly in the extreme, and more depressing to the spirits than I can well say.

"Then I noticed something that drew all of my attention. We were rapidly approaching another group of mechanical creatures. Nearer and nearer we jolted our way, hanging helplessly from the encircling cable. I can tell you, I've faced nearly every danger on earth, from war to wild animals, and I was never in such a complete flunk. I wondered what these new machines would be like, and sweated copiously. Then Stanley came to his senses all of a sudden, and screamed and struggled, and actually succeeded in slipping almost entirely from the machine's grasp. We were both raised into the air and thrown heavily to the rocky ground where I lay stunned for a moment. When we stood trembling on our feet and looked uncertainly about us, we were surrounded by seven machines—each identical with the first!

"'Marsh! Do you see them?' cried Stanley wildly. 'Tell me I'm only dreaming these horrors! They can't exist. Machines don't think!'

"'Keep calm, old man!' said I. 'I got you into this and I'll get you out if I can.'

"You know, it hadn't occurred to me that these were sentient beings—these things of metal. But Stanley was right—they walked, and captured prey, and held them captive, and now it certainly looked as though they were having a conversation, though they did not move or make any sound. I studied them in some interest for a few minutes, before I found my dignified posture completely upset, and myself put into the rôle of an interesting specimen to be examined, rather than the intelligent observer that I had imagined myself. Two tentacles shot out and threw us both to the ground and then all seven commenced probing and examining our bodies, and crowded around us like puppies discovering a turtle. After a startled moment, I determined to keep my mind calm and to ignore all indignities. I lay there quietly, and it struck me as more and more peculiar that such obviously intelligent creatures should be without some form of communication. Could it be a sort of radio signal? I thought it probable, but some impulse hammering at the back of my subconscious mind bade me turn on my side, and I did so before the strangeness of such an instinct struck me. Then I started at the thought: Could it be that they conversed by some extremely low frequency radiation that my mind could understand? I lay there with my eyes shut and tried to make my mind receptive. Presently I felt a thought come into it, but it was vague and meaningless. I waited for more, letting my muscles go limp and my body relax. Then suddenly their thoughts began to flow into my mind with startling clearness. They were strange thoughts, which formed themselves into curt words in my brain—not always understandable. Here is the gist of the mental conversation:

"'. . . . mere animal. Not intelligent beings. See primitive protoplasm structure? Wear out soon. Much better if metal.'

"'How then make reading our signal if no intelligence? How then dig with explosion great hole around entrance?'

"'Signal set there so other (a word was used here that seemed to mean *humans*, but that would be absurd—I shall call them Mech-men) . . . . so other Mech-men can find vessel here. No great brain needed to read signal. These not Mech-men, so must be natives of planet here. Natives of planet not intelligent by report of exploring party two hundred sun-cycle past. Besides, protoplasm not make intelligence.'

"'Mech-men due soon, yes?'

"'Within next ten thousand sun-cycle maybe—what difference?'

"'But these animals partly intelligent protoplasm, no?'

"'Cannot be! Protoplasm not make intelligence. Only metal make intelligence.'

"'We keep for while—then kill.'

"'Why kill? Bodies not with oil.'

"And then I opened my eyes and screamed aloud, for one of the tentacles had ripped a piece of skin and flesh from my leg, and was holding the bloody rag up to the view of his fellows. At the sound of my voice, all seven machines—or Mech-men, as I call them—faced me in silence for a few seconds as though interested in hearing the cry of some new zoological specimen. I could not understand what they were saying, for the pain of my little wound was occupying my mind to the exclusion of every other thought. Only when I was able to make my mind a complete blank and relax my body could I 'receive' the conversation of these strange beings.

"Stanley leaned over and patted my shoulder.

"'Keep a stiff upper lip,' said he. 'Does it hurt much?'

"'Never mind my damn leg,' I said. 'Did you hear them talking?'

"'Eh? Talking! I didn't hear a word! . . . . er, are you sure?'

"'It wasn't exactly talking—seems to be a sort of mental telepathy.'

"'What rot! I mean to say, mental telepathy! There isn't any such thing!'

"'But I heard them,' I said, and tried to tell him something of their conversation. He eyed me wonderingly a minute, and I could see half-credulity slowly give way on his face to complete disbelief. That man never once would believe that the Mech-men had said a word—nor that they *could* speak—in spite of all that happened later. And to this day, he thinks me a liar of the lowest sort. 'But I was *there*, Colonel,' he said, 'and I was listening hard. Not a word was spoken . . . . and you have a good imagination, you know.'

"I eyed him a minute in frank contempt, and was going to turn my back on him in dignified silence, when one of the Mech-men stepped forward and jerked us both into its metallic embrace. We were tossed into the air and held there, while our captor marched stolidly off across the level floor of the underground world. Minute after minute we jogged along, covering five feet at a stride and in mighty uncomfortable fashion. Presently, a great stone rampart showed in the distance, and after half an hour's walking, we came up under this and into a tunnel cut into its face. Then there was darkness for five or ten minutes, and we came out into another cavern, so large that neither ceiling nor walls were visible in the hazy distance. The enormous pillars of rock broke up the view, and it was like walking through some gargantuan forest with the great trunks rising up to the misty sky, or like the nave of some cyclopean cathedral. It surpassed imagination and took the breath away—that cavern. Even now, I can hardly believe that I saw it. Once we passed close by one of the great pillars, and the broad surface showed no tool marks, but was smooth as though cut with diamond powder on a wheel. That pillar had been carved from living rock! Later I was to learn how—and why.

CHAPTER III

The Domain of the Mech-Men

● "We were carried along the side of the second cavern for half a mile and came to a depression, like a little valley. Here were a series of enclosures made of steel wire, and in each was a different species of animal. There were musk-ox, reindeer, arctic fox, seal, walrus, polar bear, arctic hare, lynx, and timber wolves, to name a few that I recognized. And then I saw something that made Stanley grunt in amazement—with great domed foreheads and shaggy hair matted over the back, were a pair of woolly mammoths! They were some distance away, but were, I should judge, about twelve feet in height at the shoulders, and their restless trunks moved along the wire-mesh of their cage like serpents in pain.

"We were thrown to the ground now, and after a short while, another Mech-man

approached, and the two stood there, apparently discussing which cage we should be placed in. I shut my eyes and closed all the doors to my mind. Presently I began to 'hear' what they were saying.

"'. . . . so cannot do. Will build cage.'

"'But why not put in other cage for now?'

"'Might do. Too bad no empty cages. Try this one with white animals.'

"One of the creatures lifted me in its tentacle and started to unlatch the door behind which the polar bears were enclosed! That was a bad moment. I cried aloud and kicked violently and tried to pray all at the same time. He stopped uncertainly and brought me back to Stanley, who was sitting on the ground white and trembling. Finally the other Mech-man lifted me and took me to the enclosure that held the arctic hares. I can tell you I went in there readily enough. He returned and got Stanley, and put him beside me, then latched the door. For a minute, the two of them stood outside the cage looking at us, then they moved away in separate directions and were soon out of sight.

"Our enclosure was about one hundred feet square and had been covered with a few inches of sandy soil on which some sparse grass existed. Off in the far corner were hiding the two original owners of the area, their gray ears showing twitchingly where they crouched. Outside of the wire stretched the monotonous stone cavern floor. Across the way were the polar bears, and a sunken bath filled with water could be seen in the rear of their cage. I suddenly had a mounting respect for the Mech-men.

"'See, Stanley,' I said. 'These machines have at least sense enough to provide grass for the rabbits and water for the bears.'

"'Perhaps the bears told them what they wanted by mental telepathy,' he grunted, very sarcastically. I eyed him in some doubt, for he was acting mighty strange. His eyes rolled unpleasantly and his mouth worked. He was muttering to himself. That was bad. I walked over thoughtfully to the gate that confined us, and stared at it. Then I laughed aloud.

"'Stanley! See what they think of our great human intelligence! Here's a simple latch I can reach through and unfasten whenever we've a mind to walk out!'

"A loud and savage laugh answered me. 'Walk out where?'

"'Why, to explore the cavern, of course, and eventually escape to the upper air. Are you content to remain here forever?'

"'It would be certain death—lost in the enormous barren caves, unless we were found by one of those machines, and then we'd only be brought right back here and a stronger lock would be put on the door.'

"There was something in what he said, and I was reflecting upon the matter when a Mech-man came from behind one of the cages. Hung from his tentacle was a huge metal box. He paused by the polar bears, and threw in four large pieces of brown-looking stuff which the bears sniffed and ate. Then he went over to the two wolves in the cage next to ours, and these, too, received food. Stanley was staring at him fascinated. He parted his lips and showed his strong white teeth, which had that square appearance known as 'buck-teeth.' The Mech-man stopped before our cage and, I presume, was studying us—though having eyes on all sides of his 'head,' it was impossible to be certain of the direction in which he was looking.

"'I'm hungry,' Stanley cried to him. 'Give us some food.'

"The machine moved slightly.

"Then Stanley plucked a handful of the tired-looking grass, and opening his mouth wide, made motions as if he were eating, looking hopefully at the metal box the while. With that, the Machine turned about and made its jerky way over to the woolly mammoths, leaving us supperless. For a startled instant neither of us said anything. My eyes wandered around our enclosure and rested upon the two hares, busily munching grass. A sudden light struck me.

"'You young fool!' I cried. 'Don't you see what you did? We are in with the hares, who eat grass. The machine saw you pretending to eat grass, too, and now he thinks we can live on it!'

"'What! You mean that he won't give us any food?'

"'Reason it out for yourself,' I answered, pointing to where the Mech-man had vanished behind the far cages.

"'But we'll starve to death! Oh, what can we do to let him know that we need food?'

"I thought a moment. Then I remarked that undoubtedly the animals were fed at regular intervals. 'If he could see us eating one of these rabbits here,' I said, 'he'd know that we eat flesh, and not grass. Go catch a rabbit, Stanley!'

"Stanley had been standing near the steel wire that separated us from the wolves, and gazing longingly at them as they gobbled up the last of their food. At my words, he turned startled eyes in my direction. He stared thoughtfully at the two arctic hares in our own enclosure. Before my eyes, he dropped to hands and knees and commenced a stealthy approach in their direction, placing his hands forward one after the other as cautiously as a cat. Before he came within six feet of the hares, they, of course, sat up on their haunches, noses and ears aquiver, and hopped out of reach. I gave him a hand for a time, but without success. After half an hour, I determined to set off and explore and told my companion as much. I received no reply whatsoever. The man was stalking rabbits with a singleness of purpose not to be shaken by any diversions. So I lifted the latch and walked out of the cage, locking it behind me.

"I was hungry, but also curious, and walked straight over to the pair of mammoths. There they were on the other side of a wire fence, beasts long since extinct on earth. The nearest one was scarcely forty feet from me, and as I looked, he swayed closer, long brown trunk extended curiously. I could distinctly hear the rumbling of his stomach, and smell the warm, wet, matted odor, something like that of a goat. The thing was impossible, but true. What could be the explanation? I made up my mind that this settlement of Mech-men was ancient, and had brought the forbears of these captives here thousands of years ago during the last ice age when the woolly giants still roamed the frozen world. What other explanation could there be? But why were they here? Where did they come from? I determined to find out.

● "I explored the valley in which the caged animals were, and found it of small extent—perhaps twenty acres. It had been cut ten feet deep into the stone of the cavern floor, and two of the great black pillars rose from this steep bank to soar loftily out of sight in the hazy brightness of the roof far overhead. Up this ten-foot bank I scrambled and looked warily about for signs of movement. Where the attendant of the cages had gone, I could not imagine, but as far as I could see, there was nothing alive on the stony plain. Upon my left, toward the rocky wall and low down upon it, I made out in the distance, the black mouth of the tunnel by which we had come, but sheer distance swallowed all else. Stare as I would, there was nothing to be seen overhead except the mysterious haze of light that covered all. My problem was this: how could I venture out upon this level expanse without being seen by the first passing machine? There was but one way. I must keep close beside one of the huge pillars, and after making sure that the coast was clear, make a dash for the next one. As I have said, they were spaced about a quarter of a mile apart—almost 440 yards—and as you can see from my build, I am no great runner. But I did my best that day. I had gotten into the shelter of the third pillar, when I heard a low rumbling noise far off along the cave wall. I strained my eyes but could not make out what it was, so I cautiously looked about and made a dash for the next pillar, stopping there to recover my breath. I must have covered the distance in less than three minutes. I was close to the wall by now—no pillars were between—and I could see a great black pipe or cable about fifty feet away, that rested on the floor. It seemed to go back toward the tunnel entrance and lead on toward the course of the sound I heard in the other direction. Half an hour of alternately running and cowering brought me near enough to make out the details of a group of Mech-men. They

were standing beside a squat piece of machinery from which rose a long tapering pipe, like an elephant's trunk. The free end of this pipe moved slowly over the surface of the rock wall, and where it touched, the wall was eaten away in shallow grooves. I watched it in wonder for several minutes, and then the machine rolled ponderously forward along the wall some four or five yards, and the operation was repeated. I could get no nearer without exposing myself to the full view of the attendant Mech-men, and I knew that those bulbous eyes would not fail to notice me, so I remained where I was, peering from behind the pillar, and trying to understand what I saw. I could not make head nor tail out of it, and as they were slowly moving away from me, I determined to return and traverse the tunnel. I made sure nothing was in sight behind me, and then made a dash for the next pillar, keeping the fifty-foot thickness of the one I had abandoned between myself and the group of workers. After an hour's nervous foot work, I reached the pillar nearest the tunnel and eyed it closely as I regained my breath. Here was a fresh danger, for I might run squarely into a Mech-man at the tunnel's mouth, shrouded in blackness as it was. I sat down to rest a while, and my hand encountered a ridge in the floor. I examined it; found that it was about a quarter of an inch high and half an inch wide. It seemed clear to me that this might provide some clues. First: I reasoned, this cavern had been cut from the bed rock of the planet's crust. Second: I am reasonably sure that the machine I saw was doing the cutting—and doing it mighty slow, at that. Third: I had found a ridge which was overlooked when the last layer was planed from the floor. It is a quarter of an inch high, so the machine cuts no deeper at each operation. And fourth, how long would it take the machine I saw to carve out these caverns? In my fifteen minutes of observation it had cut a swath that could not have been more than ten feet high and thirty feet long. But if the depth was only a quarter of an inch, it would take forty-eight such cuts to make each foot of cavity. The time involved would require about twelve hours. At that rate, they would cut 200,000 cubic feet a year. Why, it was preposterous! An area a quarter of a mile square and less than two hundred feet high would take a thousand years! This cavern alone was certainly half a mile in height—possibly higher behind the light-giving zone—and if the further wall had been less than ten miles distant, I should certainly have been able to see it. Even at that, the figures I worked out roughly in my head ran into the millions of years, and there was another cavern! Then I laughed to myself at my stupidity. There might have been a thousand machines at work in the excavation—not one. Even so, I could not get rid of the idea that the place was of tremendous antiquity—the mammoths proved that.

"While I had been thinking and resting, my eyes had not left the mouth of the tunnel, and during that time there was nothing to be seen there. Now I rose to my feet and started a step forward, determined to make the attempt to reach the outer cavern. At the first step, I felt a cold cable touch my hand and grip me about the waist. I writhed to stare at the bulbous glass eyes of a Mech-man!

"I ceased struggling instantly, and to my surprise, the machine released me from its grip and stood there quietly. A wild desperation seized me, and I reached into my pocket to produce paper and pencil. I wrote out in plain print: I AM INTELLIGENT AND HUMAN. CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THIS? Then I extended the paper and the tentacle shot out to reach for it, and held it before one of its bulging eyes. I pressed my eyelids tight shut, and tried to relax my mind completely. Presently I began to understand his thoughts.

"'. . . . graphite markings on wood pulp seem useless, but positive must represent thoughts. When marking can feel brain thoughts. Have you able feel brain thoughts, human?'

"Queer, jumbled-up words they were, but I knew what was meant, and breathless with hope, I wrote out on another piece of paper YES—not bothering to show it. That worked. He could read my thoughts when

I was writing them down, and I could receive his answer by placing my mind into a complete state of repose. I had established contact at last. His name was 677439—just like that. I called him 'Nine,' for it appeared that the last figure was something like a first name with us. He was, of all things, a naturalist, and had been coming over to our cage to examine the new captives! He seemed quite eager to ask questions, and not at all disposed to take it for granted that no creature of flesh and blood could possess intelligence, though in this belief, he was alone among the Mech-men.

"Well, this fellow Nine damn soon found out that I was different from the other animals they had in their cages, and like a flash, he reached out a tentacle and hauled me upon his back and started off for the tunnel. He plunged into its blackness and I had many a misgiving before we saw light ahead and came out into the first cavern. I must confess that I had forgotten all about the pilot fellow, Stanley. We bore left from the tunnel mouth, and after twenty minutes of jolting, we rounded a huge pillar and came upon the headquarters of the Mech-men. It was sunk below the level of the floor and consisted of a huge lake of black oil with a flat surface on one side surrounded by a long, low open-air machine shop!

CHAPTER IV

The History of the Mech-Men

● "There must have been a hundred Mech-men standing around when we arrived. Most of them were working at one or another of the power tools, but fully half of them crowded about my captor, and for five minutes they stood silently there while he, evidently, was talking to them. I was too much interested in my surroundings to listen. But finally Nine, who had set me down gently upon my feet, began prodding me with his cable end, and I shut my eyes and received his question: 'What for you come to Mech-men?'

"That was a puzzler. Finally, I wrote on the pad of paper: 'TO LEARN WHY YOU HAVE SET A SIGNAL HERE.'

"I felt a mental nod pass around the group, and half a dozen began 'thinking' all together, which was even more confusing than it sounds. Then I got another question from Nine: 'Are more humans on this planet? Where humans come from? Only few hundred sun-cycle since found none thinking creatures on planet and . . . why you come planet?'

"That was hard to understand, but I started writing the history of evolution, and finally, after about five minutes scribbling, I felt Nine answer: 'We understand how all happen but very quick to have reason come. Protoplasm must grow more quick than metal. Perhaps not last so long?'

"I told him that we lived only seventy or eighty years normally. They couldn't understand years until I drew a picture of the earth going around the sun and then they became interested: "But so short a life not believable. Can no learn reason so quick. Much better if live longer.' So then I asked them how long they lived.

" 'Metal man never die,' came the answer. 'If part wear out, we fix. Why die?'

"I was all on fire to find out why they were here and how long ago they had come. I *did* find out, but there's no use going through the detail of question and answer, even if I could. I asked questions and they asked questions. That first conversation lasted ten hours, and would have gone on for ten years so far as the Mech-men were concerned. They never tire. But I fainted from hunger and exhaustion, and that put an end to it. This is about the story as nearly as I could make it out, and it's startling enough!

"A good many thousands of years ago—perhaps millions of years, for they have no unit of time except a sun-cycle, and for the life of me, I couldn't make out what vast sort of astronomical measure *that* is—these Mech-men were living on a planet near some God-forsaken sun—the Lord knows where! It must have been a dull life, to judge from what little I could understand of it. One of their chief occupations and delights consisted in leaving their planet in a space ship and travelling for hundreds of thousands of years. Then, apparently,

the custom was to return for a while and start off again in another direction. They had explored their section of Creation so thoroughly, that a group of several hundred started on a really long trip, and had eventually floated through space till they arrived near our solar system. Here they met trouble in the planetoid belt beyond Mars, and some part of the ship was smashed, and a number of the Mech-men crushed beyond repair. Unfortunately, the spectro-analysis of our sun showed that the essential element needed to repair the damage (you can't read names in a thought transmission) was not present in the solar system. So they, being unable to travel more than a comparatively short distance in their crippled condition (and that slowly) selected the earth to land upon by reason of its nearness. They prospected for a good supply of lubricant and found a vast reservoir of oil near what is now the Magnetic Pole. They didn't go abroad much upon the surface of the earth, because they hadn't much power (as they consider power) without their missing element, and from their point of view, our earth is entirely uninhabitable so long as the element *is* missing. But oil they need to preserve their metal bodies, and so they settled where they found it, up on the Boothia Peninsula.

"Well, sir, the first thing they did was to devise a signal so that the searching party they knew would come some time would know where to find them. They had only one motor left on the ship—I'm quite sure they are atomic motors, though it's difficult to say anything certain from the description—and it appears that so long as it runs, a heavy magnetic current is set up that can be felt miles out into space as well as all over the world. So they set up the motor beside their oil supply and set it to work, using the power for their daily needs. The motor uses rock for fuel, and slowly, century after century, a cavern was cut away. But although this alone would indicate that their arrival occurred millions of years ago, the fact is, there was some kind of a cave here when they arrived. How large it was, I don't know. They simply don't care anything about the cavern. All they are interested in, is to keep the motor going so the signal never fails. Time means nothing to them. Apparently it makes little difference whether their rescue comes tomorrow or a million years from now. They are eternal and timeless themselves."

● Colonel Marsh turned his icy blue eyes full upon me.

"I asked about the compass variations. And they laughed at me. They said the earth had iron irregularly distributed throughout. That caused one set of variations, which was further complicated by the rotation of the earth. The signal must lead directly to their settlement, however, or else how did I find it? And of course, they were right. I mention the matter because you, sir, were so good as to express some slight doubts which I trust are now completely resolved in your mind!"

I waved a weak assent with one hand, and he resumed his narrative:

● "As I said, I fell asleep or fainted before that talk was half over. When I came to my senses, everything looked exactly the same—though it must have been hours later—and the same Mech-men were still standing around waiting for me! I asked for some food, printing it big and desperate on paper, and one of them started off and came back in ten minutes with some grass! Then I explained I didn't eat that.

" 'But other human so eat. Why you different human?'

" 'Humans never eat grass but food like other animals in cages,' I wrote.

"I got some in another ten minutes. I don't know what it was—never tasted anything like it before or since. Hope I never shall. Hr-r-rmph! Must have been something synthetic, but I could chew it and swallow it, and after all, it must have kept the wolves and bears alive. I had eaten all I could hold when I remembered Stanley, back in his cage, and asked that some food be given to him, and water as well. (They had given me water with the food.) But not one of them would set off upon this chore. They just stepped a little closer and the second session commenced.

"This time they wanted to know all about the humans on the earth—what we did with ourselves, what we thought about, and what we liked best. Now, those may be very sensible questions. I'm not saying they aren't, but can you answer them? No more could I. The human race eats, drinks, sleeps, marries, and tries to have a good time. That was as near as I could answer the first question. We think about ways and means of getting what we want more easily from Nature. That was a bit of a euphemism upon human thought, but how could I explain the thoughts of a Hottentot negro or a gum-chewing peroxide shop-girl when they haven't any? What we like best stumped me. I answered that it depends on the individual; that everyone liked something different.

"Altogether, I should say my answers did not impress the mechanical creatures. I tried to receive their impressions, but they were vague and restless. Finally:

" 'Then you not know what best like to do?'

" 'Everybody for himself,' I wrote.

" 'But must always be one perfect thing better worth than lesser.'

" 'Maybe not know perfect,' suggested another Mech-man.

" 'Not very long able thinking, must excuse,' added a third.

"That made me angry, though perhaps it was justified, and I made the mistake of boasting. The only thing I could think of to brag about was our machinery, and they were enormously excited in an instant.

" 'But was no machine found last survey,' said one.

" 'No,' I wrote, 'we humans have only used machinery during the last few hundred years, and that must seem a short time to you.'

" 'And do machines make kind masters to you, human?'

" 'Masters!' I scratched on the pad, 'Machines are slaves to humans! We make them when we want them, and destroy them when they are no more use to us.'

"And then there *was* a turmoil! A dozen different Mech-men began thought-talking at once. Some of them were for killing me and organizing an expedition to explore the world and kill all the humans on it, in order to save the machines from cruel slavery. This was quite a popular movement. 'Machines better and must rule planet,' they said. 'Humans only protoplasm. Must die soon. What difference if now?'

"I shuddered strongly, and regretted the impulse that had made me mention machinery, but it was too late now. The thing must be faced.

"Another group of them were for killing me on the spot, but for a different reason. They didn't believe I was telling the truth, and should therefore die as a liar. True, my death would have been useless to them, for my body carried very little oil. (By the way, they considered seals a very desirable breed of protoplasm because of the oil in their blubber.) It was a mad minute, and an uncomfortable one for me, I do assure you. But finally I was questioned particularly about the machinery that we use.

"I described a steam shovel, and how we built it, and for what purpose. They made me tell how long it lasted under our care, and when I mentioned five or ten years, they were angry and shocked. I tried to tell them that a steam shovel could not think or feel, and after a few minutes I felt them in agreement with me.

"Then they wanted to know about other machines we used, and I told them about automobiles, but they weren't interested in them when they found out that they were built only to travel over roads and had no other possible motions or purpose.

"Until I was completely exhausted, they kept me there answering questions and informing them minutely about the servile condition of our machinery. I finally told them about machine shops and powered tools and described an up-to-date power plant, with its hundreds of attendants constantly spending their lives oiling and cleaning and repairing parts, and constructing new and improved pieces of apparatus to replace the old.

"'These humans kind to complicated machines, yes?'

"I saw a possible way out, and developed the theme. I described whole generations, son following father and grandson coming after—all working in the same factory and all tending the same power plant. I warmed to the subject and found that without deviating from the strict truth, there must be countless thousands of human beings who actually *did* spend their whole lives tending machinery. I had been talking upon this phase of human life for perhaps ten minutes—scribbling my thoughts out rapidly on the paper—when I was stopped by a roar of mental laughter from the circle of Mech-Men. They were enormously amused.

"'Human then *thinks* he is master and machine slave! Machine gets fed and tended under that belief! Human even builds new machine and improves year by year. Machines evolving with humans doing all work! Even if low form of machines on earth now, yet we not trouble help so astute beings!'

"I tried to get them to tell me what they meant, but the more I scribbled demands for enlightenment and arguments proving they had the wrong idea entirely, the more they laughed. They all left at once to their duties, and 'Nine' alone remained behind.

"'You no see how machines use humans to get food and care?'

"'But it is to provide *ourselves* with food and luxuries that we made the machines, and only so long as they work for *us* do we feed them and care for them!'

"'Humans must be great fools!' said Nine, and with this preposterous remark, he picked me up and started back across the prairie-like cavern floor where the tunnel mouth showed like a black dot against the mile distant cliff. Then, twenty minutes of mighty uncomfortable traveling until we arrived at the depression that housed the caged animals. Nine set me down, and I looked through the wire mesh for my companion. But Stanley was not even aware of our presence. On hands and knees, he was half hidden in the grass. It suddenly struck me that he was still stalking those rabbits! I turned to Nine, and wrote hastily on my pad:

"'Other human in the cage is hungry. Please have food and drink brought us!'

"'Will do, but wasted on mere protoplasm. Perhaps soon destroy all animals. Too much waste food.'

"That was comforting, but without a word, I walked up to the gate and opened it. Nine closed it behind me and latched it once more.

"'Can come out but not given food unless in cage. Then starve. So stay cage.'

"And with these words of warning, he was about to march away. I scribbled on my pad:

"'Wait a moment, Nine! Before you go, tell me why you think humans are fools!'

"He paused a moment. 'Who takes care of machinery? Humans, not so? Who gives oil? Humans! Who gives food to make machinery live? Humans! So humans fools to machinery. Humans slaves to machinery. Mech-men fools if keep feeding animals in cages, too.'

"And without another word that I could catch, he turned and set off out of sight to the upper level, at the same changeless, untiring gait the Mech-men always used. I walked over to Stanley and his first greeting was a snarl.

"'Keep away, you old fool! I nearly had that rabbit then!'

● "I think he was out of his head with loneliness and hunger, and the wild impossible circumstances of our position. I thought with sudden contrition that I had been given food and he none. He had had not a bite to eat for forty-eight hours. Then I looked around closely, and saw that only one rabbit was left. He had eaten the other! Eaten it raw, if you please.

"Well, I don't know how many hours I stayed in that cage with Stanley. A Mech-man brought food and water about every twelve hours, and he must have paid us six or seven visits before I got Stanley back into his right mind. I told him all I had learned, but the man refused outright to

believe that I had ever talked to a Mech-man, would you believe it?

"'But how is it they have sense enough to feed us—and all these other animals?' I would ask.

"'I've no doubt they're intelligent,' he would answer. 'What I doubt is that you have spoken to them, when I could hear there was no word passed between you!'

"And there we had it, and I could never persuade him. I told him that they might, any day, decide not to waste more food on us, but he laughed at that. I did manage to persuade him to save a little food out of each meal's supply, however, and I got both our water bottles filled (for we carried flasks, both of us—originally filled with brandy in case of accidents).

"Now, did you ever notice that you can look at a thing for hours and then go away from it, and days later something will all of a sudden occur to you that you didn't think you had noticed at the time? It came to me that way, and the thing I found I had noticed without realizing it, was the speed with which the Mech-men walked. It never varied, whether or not they were in a hurry. The speed was about six miles an hour, I should judge. I talked this over with Stanley, and he agreed with me. On this seemingly unimportant thing was based our final escape.

"Stanley had a wrist watch (I had lost mine) which he kept going, and with which we timed our meals. The hours meant nothing to us, for night and day were the same in that soft glare from above. But after what was, I think, the sixth feeding, we waited in vain for the Mech-men to come. Twenty hours had elapsed and the wolves were howling in the next cage, and the great woolly mammoths were trumpeting with their empty bellies rumbling like so many earthquakes.

"We dipped into our store of food and drank a little water as the hours passed. Then, when the second feeding time elapsed without food, I was certain that we would never be fed again, and Stanley was impressed to the point where he would listen to my plan.

CHAPTER V

Escape

● "'We have one more scant meal left,' said I. 'We can eat that and then stay here until we starve to death, if we like. But we might as well die escaping, as waiting here. Let's try to get out of these caverns and up to the surface of the earth.'

"'How can we get clear of the Mech-men? There are no trees to hide behind. We'd be caught, sure,' said Stanley.

"'We can sneak as far as luck takes us, running from pillar to pillar. Then when we are seen—as we will be, sooner or later—we can make an open break for the exit tunnel.'

"'But can you find your way?'

"I told him that I could, for I never would have persuaded him otherwise. But the truth of the matter was that I could find the tunnel into the first cave easily, but after that, I only knew the general direction. However, I knew we must escape or die where we were, and anything is better than that. I was for starting at once—losing no time at all—but Stanley was not entirely convinced, and insisted upon waiting one more hour before starting. So we waited it out in full and a few minutes to spare, and then I pushed him out through the gate and we climbed up to the great cavern floor.

"Far away to the right, we saw a group of Mech-men, tiny in the distance, clustered around their atomic power machine, and nearer by showed the mouth of the tunnel. All else was empty of life or landmark. Stanley and I skirted the rim of the depression on our bellies until a row of pillars hid us from the far distant working party, and then we stood up and ran along the row of pillars, stopping at each one to take bearings and regain our breath. In ten minutes we were crouched behind the last pillar and eyeing that tunnel breathlessly.

"'Let's go,' whispered Stanley, and we ran for it.

"Some inner caution bade me guide us to one side, and I peered around the corner and along the black passage before venturing. After a second to accustom my eyes

to the light, I perceived the dot of light at the far end. Then, as I looked, the dot vanished. I whipped about.

"'Back to the pillar!' I cried. 'Someone has just entered the tunnel!'

"We made that four hundred yards in less than two minutes, and I held a pocket mirror around its protecting curve, close to the ground, just in time to see four Mech-men come jerkily out onto the plain and turn sharply to the left. They were on their way to the cages! I was an impatient man to be away, then! But we had to wait until they were out of sight, and we sidled around to the far side of the pillar and watched them in the mirror. In a minute or two they were behind the next pillar. 'Run!' I cried.

"We didn't look back, so I don't know whether they saw us or not. Into the tunnel mouth we popped and raced to the far end. Then we stopped and used the mirror to spy. As luck would have it, we could see nothing to alarm us, and a mile or two toward the right, I could see the cavern wall reaching up out of sight. I knew that our escape must be in this direction, and at my word, we both raced out of the tunnel and away.

"We passed two pillars before we saw them: twenty or more Mech-men were almost upon us—about fifty feet to the left of our course. We swerved sharply and ran harder than ever, and they after us. After a few seconds, I glanced behind and breathed easier, for we were easily distancing them.

"'No need to work so hard,' I panted to my young friend, but he cried out, 'Hurry up, you old fool!' and ran harder than ever. Then I saw our real danger. Two Mech-men were walking along to head us off. It was like a nightmare, for they never changed their speed and seemed so inhumanly cold about the pursuit. We dodged the two, though I misjudged the length of their tentacles, which would have tripped me if I had not jumped into the air in time.

"We were close to the wall now, and raced along beside it for less than two hundred yards before I saw the welcome tunnel mouth that would lead us to safety. Into it we stumbled, breathless, with a hundred Mech-men pursuing us at the same unvarying gait. Stanley glanced over his shoulder, and it struck him as amusing, for he laughed out loud at the sight. I didn't laugh. I was wondering if we could find the way to the outer door. As I trotted along, I was trying to lay plans. It would be dark, and I had no flashlight.

"'Have you a match?' I asked Stanley pantingly.

"'None,' he answered at once. 'I looked for one back in the cage when I wanted a fire to roast that rabbit I caught.'

"I felt in my own pockets as we ran, and found one caught in the lining of the right-hand coat pocket, which I fished out and tucked into my vest. It was getting inky black by now, and we could scarcely make out where the tunnel walls were, but kept on at a half trot, for we could hear metal feet thumping far behind in the tunnel, and the sound set my heart to pounding. Then the last glimmer died away suddenly, and we stopped. I struck the match on my shoe. We had come to the entrance. There before us was the metal door, and set in the wall beside it were two levers. Stanley rushed to them and my match went out. In the blackness, I seemed to hear the pursuit much louder. Stanley swore to himself a moment.

"'Hurry and open the door!' I cried in a fury of impatience and fear.

"But Stanley only grunted, and I rushed over and fought with him to get at the things, before I got hold of myself. I stopped suddenly.

"'There must be a combination,' I said.

"'Keep quiet,' he answered. 'It's timing, do you hear that wheel turning?'

"I listened hard and heard a sort of grinding scrape ending in a click. Then Stanley pulled the other lever and we could hear a double grinding which ended in another click. Meanwhile, the Mech-men were approaching uncomfortably close: *thump, thump, thump*, back in the tunnel, and the sweat of fear poured down my face.

"'Hurry!' I groaned.

"Stanley groaned in answer, as desperate as I. 'I'll push them both back and try it over again,' he muttered. Then he gave a shout, for a crack of blinding white light showed. The crack widened every second —terribly slow—and the feet sounded as if the Mech-men would be upon us any instant, for we could see back into the tunnel but a foot. Stanley wedged himself into the opening hard enough to break a rib, as we found out afterwards, and with a gasp was through and I pushing hard behind.

"Oh, the sight of that sunlit snow! And the feeling of that crisp frozen air! It sent new life through us, and we raced across the bottom of the cavity that our dynamite had made, and were climbing up the far side, when the Mech-men started pouring out of the doorway after us, tentacles outstretched to grasp. Our legs and hands went like pistons on that short glissade, with life measured by the hundredth of a second. Stanley slipped once and fell back on me, but as luck would have it, one of my feet was against a boulder at the moment and we didn't fall. Ten feet below, the waiting tentacle was reaching for my tingling toes!

● "Then we were up on the surface and clear! We both gave a cheer with what breath we had left, and made off for the airplane at a slow trot, breathing heavily. But those Mech-men had not given up, by any means! Right after us they came over the snow, and suddenly Stanley started running at full speed again.

"'Suppose we can't get the engine started!' he cried back.

"That set me running hard, I can tell you, and we had two hundred yards lead when Stanley climbed aboard ahead of me. When I came up to the ship, he called out, 'Stay down there and help me turn the prop!'

"I had never done that job before, but he called out directions. As he watched, I seized the upper part of one blade and, standing to the rear and to one side, heaved on it with all my strength. It spun a minute and the motors coughed three or four times and then died! A glance over my shoulder showed the snow black with advancing mechanical creatures! I tried again, and once again before the motors broke into a full roar, I dodged around the advancing wheel and tried to grab a strut to climb aboard.

"I missed and the ship kept on going, faster and faster. I was running hard now and had to run even if I didn't want to get on the ship, for the Mech-men were hard upon me! The ship gathered speed and finally took to the air, leaving me on the ground.

"I kept running, though I was completely exhausted and terrified at the thought that Stanley might fly back to civilization without me. I had visions of days and nights spent half walking and half running, trying to keep out of reach of the pursuing Mech-men as long as I had the strength! I foresaw the inevitable ultimate finish of that race with death, for the Mech-men would keep up their unchanging six miles an hour forever! Then the plane circled back low over my head and Stanley waved a signal which I took to mean more speed. I was gaining fast on my pursuers. Their great weight sank in the snow, and their footing slipped in each stride. I ran as hard as I could, and felt my heart swell up and my eyes pulsed red and a great roaring commenced in my ears. The roaring grew louder and louder and the airplane landed at high speed not fifty feet to my left. I raced on, trying to catch up, and it rolled at a slow pace and taxied ahead. I was gaining rapidly. With a last effort, that left me completely exhausted, I felt my hands close on a strut and felt Stanley pull me hastily inside. Then the motors roared full blast, and I must have fainted.

"It was half an hour later when I came to my senses. Stanley was sitting half asleep over his wheel. I glanced overside, and saw that we had reached the coast and were well on our way back to the gasoline cache on Hudson Bay.

"'Well,' I said. 'This will make them sit up and take notice back in New York!'

"'Will, eh?' he grunted.

" 'Man alive,' I cried. 'It's an enormous story! Even the two mammoths alone, are news of the very first rank!'

" 'Look here, Colonel Marsh,' said Stanley awkwardly. 'I daresay you are right and all that, but I don't want people calling me a liar all the rest of my life. *You* can go as far as you like with your own story, but . . . . er, but I didn't see any of it, understand? And if you say anything about those machines I'll simply deny it.'

● "And what do you think of that?" said the red-faced Colonel to me as we sat in the Stranger Club. "Not another word would he speak to me until we got back to New York. Plead as I might, he refused to back me up in any part of my story! I tried to get the government interested, but they wanted proof and you see I couldn't give even corroborative evidence. That finished me. I haven't told a word to anyone from that day to this—and I shan't. You're a writer chap, and perhaps you can make a tale of it. But don't mention my name if you can help—Oh pshaw! what difference! Even if you do use my name, no one will believe you."

I wanted to ask questions, but just then another member entered—Jean LaBert of Marseilles (he has quite a reputation down in French Africa)—and the Colonel waggled a warning eyebrow and raised an admonitory finger to bind my silence. When next we met, he refused even to discuss the matter—so here is the story, all there is of it and all there is ever likely to be.

Unless, some day, the Mech-men decide upon another exploration of the world with a view to seeing for themselves what treatment our machinery is receiving . . . . and if they do . . . . !

THE END

The End of Tyme

By A. Fedor and H. Hasse

(Continued from page 341)

to—' Officials of the institution wish to announce that the man is not dangerous, merely a mental case, and hopes are held for his speedy return."

In his office, editor B. Lue Pencill read this latter item. For a few moments he stared pensively at the spot where he had first noticed Tyme. Then he sighed, and sadly shook his head.

Suddenly he became editorially brisk. Why, he hadn't done any work at all on that story besides reading it! He must permit his associate editors to know of his plans. There were the editorials to be written in its honor; the circulars to be mailed. He must have the best artist draw the illustration—perhaps two illustrations would be better; and, of course, the story must have the cover painting.

That story!

His eyes gleamed in remembrance. "Yes, indeed—beyond a doubt the best thing *Future Fiction* has had yet. 'The End of Time'—it shall take its place among the classics. So unique in its theme—so refreshingly original in its plot—so tremendous in its scope! And, above all, so plausible. Just what the readers have been wanting. So plausible—why, I almost believed it myself!"

THE END

Astronomical Discoveries

● EVERY MONTH, new discoveries in science are made, and published in scientific journals, but in highly technical language. You will find these, when of interest to the general reader—and the science fiction fan—reported in brief, understandable language in the *Science News* and *Science Digest* pages of EVERYDAY SCIENCE AND MECHANICS. For instance, the great white spot discovered on Saturn a short time ago, which is as large as the whole surface of the earth; the newest conclusion about the "white dwarf" stars; the annular eclipse of a few days ago; the fall of meteorites, which recently proved fatal to human beings, etc., are among the astronomical news items in the current issue of

Everyday Science and Mechanics *for November, 1933*

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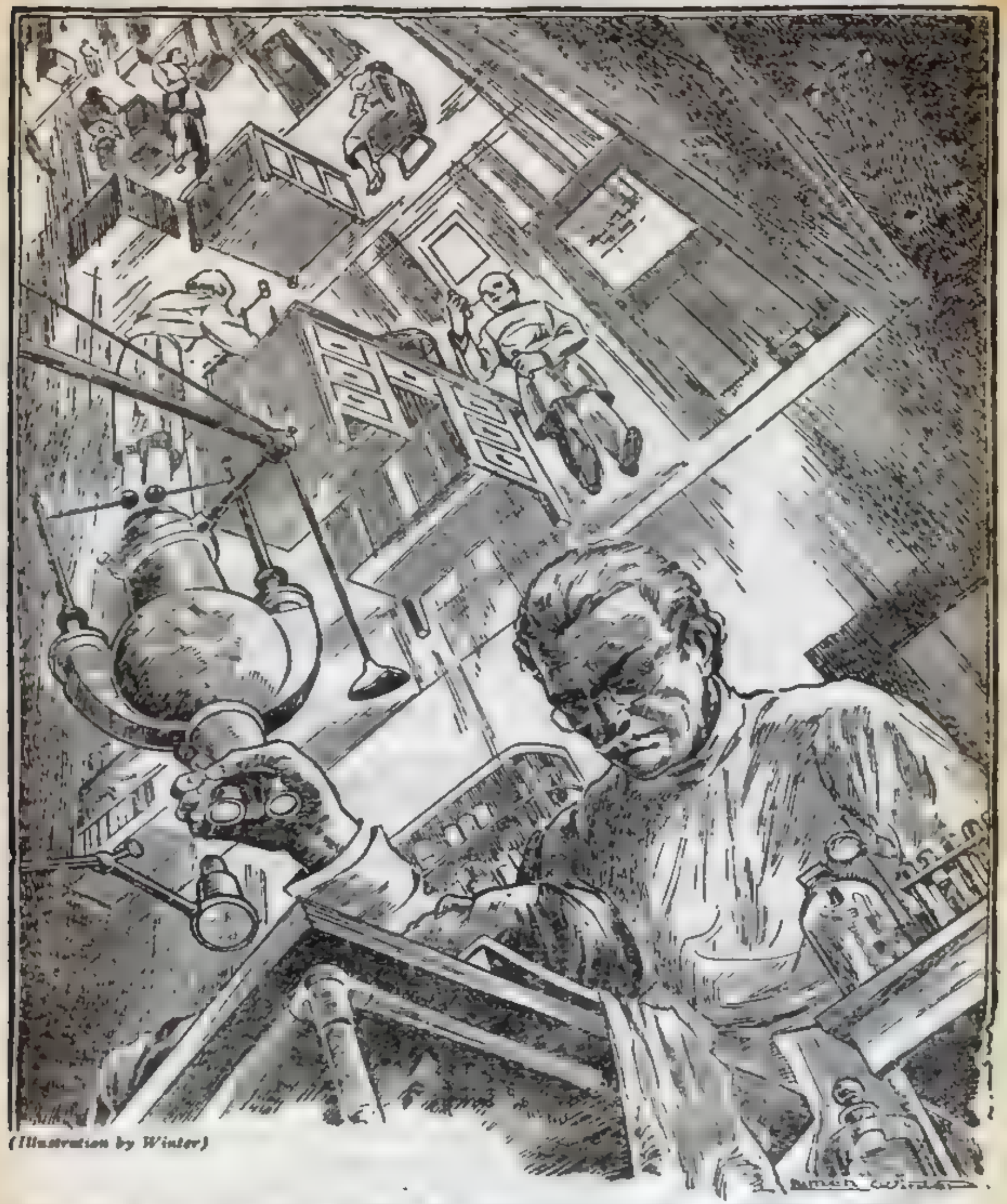

(Illustration by Winter)

He was looking through the ceiling of the laboratory as though no ceiling were there!

THE MAN WITH X-RAY EYES

By EDMOND HAMILTON

● Perhaps the facts propounded in the present story are all too true . . . . we know that some of them are. Perhaps it is well that the truth about many matters is kept from the public mind . . . . while the knowledge of others would definitely aid civilization.

If someone offered you the power of seeing everything—through walls—would you accept? We'll wager you would. And David Winn accepted. He wanted to see all there was to see. He wanted the world revealed to his eyes. No real harm can come from merely using the sense of sight, you say. But read the story and you may change your opinion.

● Dr. Jackson Homer, tall and thin and gray, listened in half-fascinated doubt to his caller's rush of words. They swept on, quick, eager, convincing. He was young, this dark-haired, vivid-faced fellow who had given his name as David Winn. His arguments rang with the confidence of youth as yet unacquainted with defeat.

Winn gesticulated, motioned colorfully to drive home his arguments. His clear voice echoed from the walls of Dr. Homer's long laboratory, set delicate brass and nickel instruments on the shelves and vessels of shimmering glass on the tables to quivering, drifted out of the open window to be lost in the morning confusion of a sunny crosstown street of New York.

"You *can't* refuse!" Winn asserted. "It means a human being to test your process on, and you admit that you want to try it on a human."

"I would like to very much, yes," Dr. Homer sighed. "It would complete my investigation. But I had not thought of being able to do so until you volunteered—the risks—"

"What risks?" challenged young David Winn. "You've done the thing to a dozen animals from dog to monkey, haven't you, without changing anything in them except their eyesight?"

"The eyesight alteration is change enough," Dr. Homer said. "You say that you are a newspaper reporter and not a scientist. Do you realize exactly what my process involves?"

"Of course I do," David Winn answered. "I read the newspaper accounts of it thoroughly, from the first mention of your work that appeared three months ago.

"That first article said that you, Dr. Homer, the eminent biologist of Manhattan Foundation, believed that you could change the eyes of animals so that they could see through stone and metal and such substances as easily as through glass.

"You proposed to do this by making the retinas of those animals' eyes sensitive to certain ultra-violet vibrations instead of light-vibrations. They would see by these ultra-violet radiations instead of by light, and since all inorganic matter is transparent to these particular vibrations, so would it be transparent to their eyes."

Dr. Homer nodded. "Yes, that was a fairly correct statement of my purpose in undertaking this series of experiments. I was sure I could make animal eyes capable of seeing through solid matter."

Winn leaned forward. "Then, two weeks ago, the papers said that you had succeeded. You had so changed the sensitivity of the eyes of several animals that they saw by the ultra-violet waves and could look straight through stone or metal or any inorganic substance. They could not see through living things or matter derived from living things, as these particular

vibrations would not penetrate organic matter.

"That article added that you were of the opinion that you could change human eyes in just the same way by altering the retina's sensitivity, and that a man whose eyes were so treated could see through stone and brick walls, through metal of any kind, in fact, could see through almost everything except living beings and such part of their clothing and possessions as were of organic matter."

David Winn's face lit. "That's why I came here to volunteer as a test-subject for your process! I want you to change my eyes so that I too will be able to look through solid matter as though it didn't exist!"

"But why?" Dr. Homer asked him keenly. "Just why do you want this power of looking through doors and walls at will?"

"Not for criminal purposes, if that is what you are thinking of," Winn told him.

"Yes, that is what was in my mind," Dr. Homer admitted. "I can take no chance of turning loose on this city a criminal who is able to see through its walls as though they were glass."

"I can satisfy you that I've no criminal ideas," David Winn assured him. "I told you I was a newspaper reporter. I'm a young one, an inexperienced one. But once I had this power, I would be the greatest reporter who ever lived!

"Do you see what I mean? If I can look through walls and see what people are doing behind closed doors, I can get stories no other reporter can get. I can even see what people are *saying* behind closed doors —I've practised lip-reading during the last few weeks in anticipation."

● The young man's face gleamed, enthusiasm in his eyes as he bent forward. Dr. Homer considered him. "So that is it—you want my process to make you the reporter who sees everything?"

"That's what I want, to see everything!" Winn declared. "Why, within weeks this power of mine would bring me a better job and a bigger salary than any other reporter in the country!"

"You wish me to change your eyesight because it will bring you a larger salary?" the scientist asked. "You must want that increased salary very badly."

David Winn smiled. "I do, and the reason is the usual one—a girl. Marta Ray and I are very much in love with each other, but a cub's salary wouldn't be much when we're married. But on the salary I'll make when I start seeing through doors and walls—"

"And you're willing to undergo this change of eyesight to get that," Dr. Homer commented. "You understand, once your eyes were changed in this way the process could not be undone?"

"Why should anyone want it undone?" Winn countered. "If I can just get that power, I'll be satisfied to keep it and to use it."

Dr. Homer thought in silence for a time. His brows knit. He looked out through the window at the noisy morning traffic in the street below. From the window, his gaze went to a long white table over whose end was suspended an upright mechanism of brass and steel and quartz.

The scientist walked over to the instrument, fingered its connections. David Winn watched him intently. Dr. Homer suddenly turned.

"I am going to use the process on your eyes, Winn," he said. "But there are conditions."

He raised a rigid finger. "First, if the process does succeed with your eyes, you are to tell absolutely no one of your power."

"I agree to that," Winn said quickly.

"Second, you will promise never to use that power for criminal or vindictive purposes."

"I do promise," David Winn told him. "And now? You'll do the thing at once?"

"I might as well," said the scientist. He seemed torn by doubts. "I don't know—I may be doing wrong in this, but I've *got* to see if the human retina reacts like the others.

"Yes, I'll do it at once," he went on

"The process will take less than two hours —of course you'll have to be anæsthetized during it."

Under his direction, David Winn removed coat and vest and climbed up onto the white table and stretched out.

Dr. Homer swung the suspended instrument over him, carefully adjusted its tubes until twin quartz lenses were directly over the eyes of the prostrate young man. He then placed ready on a smaller table, glass containers of pink and green solutions, instruments, and droppers.

He swung the tube of an anæsthetic-gas apparatus toward Winn's face, then held its rubber nose-piece in his hand.

"All ready?" he said.

"All ready," David Winn smiled. "If all goes well I'll be seeing you—and much else—in two hours."

Dr. Homer nodded. "If all goes well," he repeated. "Here goes."

The gas-apparatus hissed—

The Man with X-Ray Eyes

● David Winn opened his eyes and looked up from the table on which he lay. He saw the anxious face of Dr. Homer bending over him. There seemed a faint violet tinge in the light, but David Winn could see no other change. Had the process failed?

Then as he looked up past Dr. Homer's face, he gasped. He was looking up through the ceiling of the laboratory as though no ceiling was there! He was looking up at the bottom of a table, several chairs, and two white-coated scientists busy with flames and tubes, all seemingly suspended miraculously in the air a dozen feet above him.

And above these, in turn, David Winn could see other objects and other men suspended in the same way. Level above level he could see as clearly as though the ceilings and floors dividing them did not exist, far up through the great building's many levels to the open air.

Then the explanation came in full force to David Winn's half-dazed mind. He struggled up to a sitting position.

"You did it, then!" he exclaimed. "The process succeeded!"

"Did it?" Dr. Homer asked him keenly. "Has your vision changed any?"

"Changed?" Winn drew a long breath. "I'll say that it's changed. Why, I can see through the ceilings above and the walls and even this table I'm sitting on, as though they didn't exist!"

It was true. To David Winn's eyes, the walls, floors and ceilings of the building had vanished. He could see up through level above level into the open air. In each level he saw only the human beings, their clothing, wooden doors and tables; only organic matter.

He could look down through similar levels to the surface of the ground below. It occurred to him that he saw the ground only because it was so intermixed with organic matter in its upper layer.

Dr. Homer helped him to clamber down from the metal table. Winn seemed to himself to be standing on empty space, the tile floor invisible to his sight. It was an eery sensation.

He took a few steps tentatively across the room and blundered into something invisible that upset with a crash.

Winn made a wry face. "I'll have to look out for metal furniture, won't I? But it's wonderful—wonderful—"

Dr. Homer's face held excitement. "You can see only organic matter, then, the same as my animal subjects?"

"Just the same," said David Winn. Elation was beginning to replace his bewilderment. "Think of it, I'm looking straight through the walls! The reporter who can see through walls!"

"You've no regrets, then, that you underwent the process?" the scientist asked, and Winn laughed.

"Regrets? I wish that I'd been born this way. I'm going to see the world as it really is from now on, and not just the walls behind which it hides!"

He put on his hat and maneuvered to the door, Dr. Homer helping him. He grasped the invisible door-knob.

"I'll be back tomorrow to make whatever scientific tests you want, doctor. Just

now I'm eager to make use of my power."

"Be careful," Dr. Homer warned. "Take it easy until you learn how to navigate."

David Winn closed the door, walked down a hall and invisible stairs carefully, and emerged into the street.

Crowded New York was an astounding spectacle to his eyes now that he saw only the living and organic matter in it.

The great buildings of stone and steel had largely vanished to his sight, and he now saw only the level above level of working people and miscellaneous organic objects they contained.

He could see none of the automobiles and buses thronging the street before him. His eyes beheld only groups of people in sitting posture rushing to and fro suspended in the air.

He set off for his newspaper-office. It was but two blocks away, but before he reached it, David Winn had almost been run down at intersections by two taxicabs invisible to his eyes; had been roundly cursed by a man pushing a metal hand-truck along the sidewalk, which he had run into; and had tripped twice over objects he could not see.

When he got into the city-room of his paper, it presented as weird an appearance as the street. Men sat at desks invisible to his eyes, using invisible telephones and typewriters. Winn threaded cautiously through them to the city-editor's desk.

The editor, Ray Lanham, looked up as he approached and tossed a scrap of paper toward him.

"Where have you been all morning, Winn?" he asked. "Here's a list of some of the most prominent men in the city—I want you to get as many of them as you can to state their opinion on the latest disclosures of civic graft."

"This assignment ought to be easy enough for you," Lanham added. "Phone in what you get in time for the rewrite."

David Winn smiled as he pocketed the slip of paper. "Don't hunt easy assignments for me, for from now on I'm the best reporter you've got," he said. "In one week all the newspapers in this town will be begging me to work for them."

Civic Corruption

● Grinning to himself at the editor's dumbfounded face, he walked out of the office and reached the street.

When he saw a taxi-driver sailing along amid the weird throng of rushing figures in the street, David Winn hailed him and entered the cab he could not see. He sped downtown in eery progress.

The first name on his list was that of Roscoe Saulton, candidate for governor. Winn left the cab at the Saulton Campaign Headquarters, and found his way up through the invisible walls and stairs and floors to the suite of offices he wished to reach.

He found two other newspapermen waiting to see Roscoe Saulton on the same matter, and Saulton was just appearing from the inner offices. His big, good-humored face was wreathed in a welcoming smile.

His face sobered as David Winn put his question. It became almost stern.

"I have only the strongest condemnation for all forms of civic graft," he declared. "This rottenness that has been uncovered in our body politics must be destroyed!"

"Can we quote you as saying that if elected you will do all in your power to cleanse municipal politics?" one of the reporters asked, and Saulton nodded vigorously.

"You may, and I hope that you make it emphatic. I am seeking the office of governor only that I may serve the people, and I know no better way to serve them than to smash this political ring of chicanery and fraud that has long disgraced this city."

He shook hands heartily with them. "Good day, gentlemen—and remember that I am always glad to see you."

As Roscoe Saulton returned to the inner offices and the other two newspapermen went out, David Winn lingered.

He could look through the walls into the inner office to which Saulton had gone, and could see Saulton and the half-dozen other cigar-smoking men in that office as clearly as though the intervening walls did not exist.

Winn could see the movement of their lips and read from it what they were saying. Saulton had sunk into a chair and was speaking to one of the others.

"More damn reporters to get my opinion on graft," he was saying. "They've kept me busy damning the organization up and down all morning."

The other men grinned. "Don't damn it too hard when you're relying on it to put you into office next month, Saulton," one of them said.

Another contradicted. "Go as far as you like with your denunciations," he advised the candidate. "It doesn't hurt the organization a bit and it will get you votes."

"Well, once I'm in the governor's chair, I'll give short shrift to these pussyfooting reformers," Roscoe Saulton growled, "but right now I've got to coddle them along, worse luck."

David Winn's absorbed watch was interrupted by a secretary who came up to him in the outer office.

"Is anything the matter?" the man asked. "You've been staring at the wall for minutes."

Winn turned. "Oh, just a little absent-minded, I guess. Good day."

Winn walked out of the building to the street. He felt disgusted to the core of his being.

So this was Roscoe Saulton, the gubernatorial candidate whose integrity was unquestioned! A pseudo-reformer who denounced political graft even while he used it to reach office.

Others, everyone, might be taken in, but the truth could not be hidden from the eyes of David Winn. He had looked through the walls behind which Saulton thought himself secure, had seen the real Roscoe Saulton.

He looked at the next name on his list. It was that of James Willingdon, financier and mining-magnate and philanthropist whose eminence was known over the whole nation. Winn got another cab to take him to Willingdon and Company's Wall Street offices.

He was passed through a half-dozen secretaries and underlings until he at last reached the office of James Willingdon's personal secretary and explained his errand. The secretary was beautifully courteous.

"Mr. Willingdon is engaged in an important business conference, but I will see whether he can see you for a moment. Will you please wait here?"

David Winn looked after the secretary as he went through an invisible wall into the next office. There were a dozen men in that room, gathered round a long table. Winn saw them as clearly as though there were no wall separating them.

He saw James Willingdon himself at the head of the table, a man of fifty with a gray face, steely gray eyes, and a straight, erect figure. Willingdon was speaking to the others at the table.

Winn could read the movement of his lips as clearly as though he were hearing the words issuing from them. "I tell you, it's the best proposition any of us have ever had," James Willingdon was saying. "We announce United Mines, and with our names and the publicity we'll give it, the public will fall over itself to buy the stock. When it's gone high enough we'll unload without warning."

"What if the public learns what has happened afterward?" a tall, anxious-looking man queried. "We wouldn't be very popular, I can assure you."

"There's no chance they'll even suspect —we'll simply assert that bear raiders broke the stock's value and that we lost more than anyone else!" James Willingdon answered. "They'll never question it any more than they ever have before."

"Very well, we're with you, Willingdon," another said. "But remember, no double-crossing—we sell at the same time."

● The personal secretary who had been hovering close by came quickly forward and spoke to the financier.

David Winn saw Willingdon excuse himself to the others and come with the secretary out into the room where he waited.

James Willingdon's face wore a smile of perfect-seeming sincerity as he shook Winn's hand.

"I can spare you only a moment, Mr. Winn," he said, "for some of my associates and I are busy planning a project that will mean great things for this country—yes, great things.

"But my secretary said that you wanted my opinion of the recent graft-disclosures, and my duty as a citizen comes before all else. As a citizen of this municipality, I want to put on record my utter detestation of all such wrong-doing as has just been disclosed."

David Winn went out of the place with a bitter smile. So James Willingdon, great financier and revered philanthropist, was —just a crook. Just another like Roscoe Saulton.

It came to Winn as he emerged into the street that his new eyesight gave him more than the power to look through walls—it gave with it the power to look through the falsities of ordinary existence into the true hearts of men.

Ten minutes later, David Winn was putting his question to the third man on his list, one of the overlords of the clothing industry.

The clothing-magnate spoke eloquently against civic corruption. He dwelt on the horror of defrauding poor as well as rich. He mentioned Lincoln and Washington. But David Winn was not listening.

The offices of this man were on the ground floor of the great block of buildings that housed his shops. Winn looked through the offices' walls as though they did not exist, was staring into those far-stretching factory-divisions.

He saw the long rows of pinched-looking, pale-faced girls and women bent over machines, working like so many automatons without looking up. He saw panting youths struggling with hand-trucks of clothing and fabrics and furs through ill-lit, ill-ventilated corridors and rooms.

Winn avoided shaking hands with the denouncer of graft and escaped into the street. He felt a revulsion.

He walked along the street, forgetting his further names for the time, and found himself passing a curious structure.

Its walls were transparent to his eyes like those of all the other buildings in sight, of course. But its interior seemed divided into a great number of very small rooms.

There were men crowded in nearly all the rooms, as far back into the structure as he saw. Some of the men lay in stupefied sleep. Others gazed longingly into the streets.

The Horrors of the City Revealed

● It was a prison. Winn saw the guards in the corridors between the cells, the debased character of many of the occupants, the unconquerable dirtiness, as clearly as though there were no walls and bars between.

He had many times passed the stately gray stone building before, but never until now had he seen through the stone front to the foulness and misery within. He passed hurriedly on.

But the next building was worse. It was a large hospital. He had passed this, too, many times in the past, and had admired the neatness of the big brick building with its gleaming sun-rooms and other rooms showing their expanse of shining glass window.

But now David Winn's eyes saw nothing of the neat brick walls, the glistening glass. He looked through brick and plaster and metal to the building's interior. He saw long rows of mattresses, resting on beds he could not see; hundreds of them.

Men and women were stretched upon them, and children too. Some were tossing feverishly in the grip of dread diseases. Others shrieked in the agony of pain. He could see men whose limbs were but bandaged stumps, could see children lying supine in casts.

He gazed up through the level on level of rows of beds and sufferers to the operating-rooms, glimpsed the flash of steel instruments suddenly reddened. He saw the sheet being drawn over the faces of suddenly quiet figures, beheld new sufferers being brought hastily in from the ambu-

lances at the rear. Sick and shaken, David Winn stumbled on.

He passed quickly the adjoining insanity-hospital, turning his head away from the building through whose transparent walls he could see men and women tearing at the bars of their cells and at themselves, or sitting and staring droolingly into nothingness. He kept his eyes averted until he had turned the corner.

The grotesque spectacle of the city hummed and swarmed in the warm afternoon sunlight as he went down this street. He hardly knew now where he was going, hardly was aware of the weirdness of the spectacle that the street presented to his eyes. In his soul, a horror was expanding that he could not conquer.

● Now it was a section of the slum-district through which he was passing. But he did not see it as it appeared to the eyes of others in the street, a narrow thoroughfare lined with dingy brick-fronted tenements and noisy with children playing on the worn cobbles He was seeing what lay behind the dingy building-fronts.

David Winn's eyes beheld an unimagined dirtiness and squalor through the walls that were transparent to them. He saw large families crowded into a single room, with shabby mattresses piled in a corner showing on what they slept at night. He saw scavenging children returning triumphantly home with revolting food.

In those rabbit-warrens of filth and darkness, his super-penetrating vision descried every species of crime, breeding and taking place. Men and women sodden with poisonous liquor, he saw, and others pale and flaccid from the drugs they took as he watched. Children were deftly instructed in crime in places whose walls could not bar the gaze of David Winn.

Winn tried to tell himself that all this had always been, that it was only because he now saw it all that he was so shaken with horror, but it was unavailing. Wherever his steps took him, wherever his eyes turned, he looked through walls into some new nest of pain or foulness or crime hidden from the light of day.

He was sick, sick unto his soul. Why, he cried to himself, had he ever been so mad as to let his eyes be changed? Why had he not realized what it would mean? All the wretchedness and wrong-doing and horror of life that was hidden from other men by walls would always be staring him in the face. He would see them always with eyes that penetrated all concealment.

If his eyes could be changed back to their former state, if the process could be undone—but no, it could never be undone. Dr. Homer had warned him of that. He would always be like this, always descrying through any concealment the horror hidden from all others.

"God Keep Us Blind—!"

● But if he could get away, with Marta! David Winn's heart leapt to catch at the sudden gleam of hope. In the country there would be fewer walls, less hidden things. They could be married and go there to live, just he and Marta together. Marta loved him and would understand—

He would go to her, explain to her. Feverishly, David Winn walked northward until he came to the apartment-building he sought. He raced up the invisible stairs and along the hall. His hand was raised to knock on Marta Ray's door, but he paused as he looked through the transparent wall and saw Marta and her mother.

They were talking, and their faces were turned half toward him. David Winn read their lips as clearly as though he heard their speech.

"He said that if his plans worked out we could be married quite soon," Marta was saying.

The mother sniffed. "Why you have anything to do with him, I don't know. David Winn has nothing and never will have anything."

"Oh, don't start that again, mother," Marta Ray said wearily. "I know David doesn't amount to much."

"Then why are you going to marry him?" her mother demanded.

"Because David is the best I can get. I have to marry someone, don't I?" said the girl discontentedly.

(Continued on page 407)

(Illustration by Winter)

. . . . Jimmy froze. Something in the irregularity of the winking of the idol caught his attention.

THROUGH THE EINSTEIN LINE

By J. HARVEY HAGGARD

● Here is another thrilling story of adventure on an alien world, and although this foreign planet is not in our Solar System, it is not far from Mars. How can this be? "Through the Einstein Line" will answer this question. Perhaps you can make an accurate guess.

"Familiarity breeds contempt." This proverb is cleverly illustrated in this story, but you will find the ending much to your liking.

Here is adventure, cowardly betrayal, breath-taking suspense, and heroic action.

● "Damn! Why in God's name don't you watch what you're doing, Captain Bull Gorgon? You're as clumsy as a bear, and about as thick-skulled as an ox!"

The words exploded through the large single-roomed space-ship. Up in front by the glassite prow, automatic controls were guiding the ship, which was a green-and-blue Earth-Guard vessel, through the great empty vastness beyond Neptune, toward Pluto. Few asteroids were present in this section of space, and the automatic devices kept the patrol boat unwaveringly on her predestined line.

At a small table which had been slid from the wall, sat two men, or had sat two men, eating. Both were garbed in the silvery metal-weave suits of the Earth-Guard, and the "Rocket and Shooting-Star" emblem upon both of their collars proclaimed them to be officers in that vast protective organization which the Earth had organized throughout space. One of them, a tall, lithe young man, had arisen. His face, space-tanned to a healthy leather hue, was contorted with anger. His shock of dark hair, a bit inclined to be curly, was unkempt, and his crystal blue eyes were glowing.

Jimmy Dane, Captain of the Earth-Guard, was mad, and plenty mad. He was a handsome young man and somewhat meticulous in his dress. He was particularly proud of the silvery metal-mesh uniform which he always kept meticulously clean. But it certainly didn't look very tidy now.

Indeed, far from it. A fine sloppy gravy was dripping off of his tunic and trousers with a slow viscous sliminess, and particles of concentrated vegetable stew clung within the sticky rivulets running down his leg. They had been partaking of one of their regular meals when the huge man opposite him, Captain Bull Gorgon, had carelessly knocked over a bowl of stew, strewing its contents full in Jimmy Dane's meticulate lap.

"Ray blast you!" expostulated Jimmy Dane angrily, wiping great smears of the stuff off with a bare hand and flinging it disdainfully. "There's about as much substance in that brain of yours as there is in the space outside of that prow right now! You did that on purpose, you big cow."

Bull Gorgon stared up, his massive features squinted. He was huge and strong. Scars writhed up and down his face and his nose was broken. Massive eyebrows surmounting his face made him a none-too-handsome sight. His huge forearms were grasping the table edge, and huge muscles rippled up his arms.

"You're a liar!" he snarled in a heavy booming voice. "I didn't do that on purpose and you know it, Jimmy Dane! You lousy ladies' fop, does it hurt you so much to have a little good soup spattered over your countenance? By the doggoned Dog-star itself, Jimmy, it makes you much more handsome!"

Bull Gorgon, whose momentary wrath had vanished, looked with twinkling eyes at Jimmy Dane, wiping the soup off of his vest. It was truly a ludicrous sight. Jimmy looked more like he'd been in a bath in a Venusian mud-puddle.

Smack! Socko! Jimmy's fists landed in quick succession upon the broad rugged moon-face of the man before him. Bull Gorgon was a heavy man, but the force behind the iron fists landed him in the chair halfway across the room.

He got up, tearing the fragments of the chair from around his legs. His huge seven-foot body was truly massive and imposing when he stretched to his full height. And he was built accordingly. But now his face was filled with fury, and he looked like a charging bull as he leaped across the space.

Bam! That was taking Jimmy, full on the chin. Gravy, Jimmy, and all, landed against the wall with a forceful jar and that stunned young gentleman looked up at a wrathful giant who seemed about to go amuck and wreak bedlam.

● For a moment they stood there, each astonished at the sudden culmination of events. The lousy big-headed ox!—thought Jimmy. Suddenly he hated the huge man before him, hated the comrade who had stood side by side with him and faced death time and again. Gorgon had saved Jimmy's life more than once, but on the other hand Jimmy had also saved the big man. It would have been better to have left him to die on some other planet among vicious creatures! He was becoming unbearable. More than once he had shown his contempt for Jimmy, whom he considered a dandy in the foppish sense of the word.

Something torn from Jimmy's clothes in the brief scuffle fell to the floor with a rattle. Both looked down, watched it roll to a standstill.

It was the *Rocket and Shooting-Star* insignia of the Earth-Guard. In that tiny coat of arms there was courage, bravery, self-sacrifice. Nothing mean or little about it. It stood for the men brave and true, of high ideals, who were risking their lives every hour of their existence out there in space, so that their fellowmen back on earth would be safe.

Bull Gorgon eyed it sullenly. Wrath fell slowly from his face and left it impassive. Neither moved, staring at the tiny insignia.

Slowly Bull spoke.

"Jimmy," he drawled. "I hate your guts! As a man I despise you as a weak feminine thing! But, by God, I won't go back on that —the *Rocket and the Shooting-Star*—while we're on duty!"

Jimmy spoke in return, wiping the blood from his face.

"If it wasn't for that, Bull, I'd beat your face to a pulp. I'd mash you down till you howled for mercy! But you're right! We'll have to call a truce! But back on earth, it'll be different! We won't be on duty, and then I won't restrain myself!"

Bull Gorgon, eyeing Jimmy, grinned and licked his lips.

"I'll kill you then," he whispered. "Sure as God made little shooting-stars."

Sullenly then, Jimmy turned to clean up the mess, to tidy the table and slide it back into the wall, while Bull Gorgon turned on his heel and stalked over to the control board before the glassite prow, where he stood staring moodily into the empty void.

How different Bull Gorgon had become, thought Jimmy. Jimmy could remember those first exciting days he had with Bull Gorgon, when they were both rookies. How they had fought side by side on other planets, how they had quelled a mob of Martian red-shelled monsters with their bare fists. How comradely they had been then. They surely would have died for each other. Now, those little differences in each other which they disliked had become magnified with untold agony throughout the long silent vigils of their patrol.

Jimmy finished tidying up the little table. He changed into a cleaner suit and washed the blood from his face. Brushing his hair, he turned.

"Gorgon," he said slowly. "I've come to know you in your true self. For years we've been side by side, and I never knew you. I'll never go out on another voyage with you. I'm going to request that I be transferred to another ship on Pluto."

"That's fine," growled Gorgon. "And the sooner we reach Pluto the bet—"

His voice ceased suddenly. Abruptly the space ship lurched. Jimmy was flung against the wall and the comb flew from his fingers. He cursed. Another trick!—he knew it before he wheeled and saw Bull Gorgon at the controls, wrenching them viciously around.

The cad!—in this empty space he had but made the maneuver to catch him off balance. Pluto was far away yet.

Stumbling along the wall, Jimmy slid toward Gorgon. The space ship swung again, and in the supposedly empty space before the prow swung a broad rocky surface. Jimmy grasped supporting handrails about the ship in astonishment.

● A planet—and they were hundreds of thousands of miles from any planet! What was this broad rocky body? Surely not Pluto!

A nightmare vision! Crashing sidewise the space-ship reeled on, tearing at its propulsive power, with the huge giant of a man clinging on to the controls savagely, and Jimmy hanging to the handrails to keep from being thrown back and forth. A hundred tiny blazing suns reeled across and behind that great jagged body ahead of them.

Something was wrong; different. The light suffusing the control room had changed from a healthy sunlight color to a greenish-blue, and the mad pandemonium of mass below span upward. Jimmy was shouting in horror and astonishment.

Crash! A gigantic shock hurled him from the handrail across the ship. A massive terrain had loomed suddenly, instantaneously, before the glassite prow. There was a rain of glittering glassite fragments as Jimmy lost consciousness.

He again came back into the world with a dull throbbing as of gigantic pistons knocking upon his temple. For some moments he lay there. Then he opened his eyes.

He was lying near the prow in a littered heap of glass and débris. All about the control room was confusion. Chairs overturned, broken fixtures. And there was Gorgon, leaning against the control board.

No, he was wrong. Gorgon, faithful to the controls to the last, had stuck to them. One huge hand was even yet clutching limply at a lever. His body was sagging, but that which supported its dead weight, for Gorgon was dead to the world, was his head, which had caught grotesquely between two uprights on the control board, and by this, the body was suspended.

Gorgon's eyes were closed and a big gash spewed forth red blood from his cheek. Jimmy stirred impulsively. He must get to the big fellow; see if he was dead. Jimmy was somewhat surprised to find himself soaking wet, and then he saw the reason. The water reservoir of the space-ship had been wrenched and cracked. Its contents had run through the crack, down through the hull of the ship.

Dazedly picking himself up, gingerly supporting himself by the wrenched control board, Jimmy was a little surprised to find that beyond a general dishevelment and a good shaking up, he had suffered no injuries. Through the gaping hole where the glassite had once been, he saw an expanse of dark jagged bleakness, an upheaval of sharp upturned crystalline rocks of brown glass-like appearance, beyond which was the gleaming of a lake.

The floor of the space-ship was askew, but Jimmy hurried to Gorgon's side. Lifting the great weight of the big body, Jimmy managed to extricate Gorgon's head. He let the body slump limply to the floor, and then knelt by his erstwhile comrade's side. Bleeding wounds were at either side of his head. Jimmy gasped with relief when he examined the neck with his hands and found that the vertebræ were not broken.

At the wrist, he could feel no pulse. He stripped back the torn metalline tunic, but a collar of an undersuit was so tightly puffed up by the swollen neck that Jimmy could not open it. He managed to slit the suit with a sharp pocket-knife. He believed he detected a faint throbbing over the heart.

CHAPTER II

Strange Encounters

● Water! He must have water. The huge head and face were slowly becoming purple. Rushing to the water taps, Jimmy cursed. Not a drop came. All had leaked down the crack in the hull.

Then his gaze was again torn out across the bleak expanse of jagged rocks, for between outcroppings, he saw a gleam of water. Instantly he had seized a dented water container and had run to the jagged open prow. For a moment, he balanced precariously on the jagged fragments of the window ledge, and then he had leaped to a narrow ledge below.

Though accustomed to the sights of strange worlds, he was suddenly aware of the etherical bizarrity of this one. Crystalline growths vaguely resembling trees jutted upward. The atmosphere was of a vague green tinge, and the most unreal aspect was the thousands of tiny gleaming suns circling high in the heavens above.

There were thousands of them and they literally specked the sky, throwing off a phosphorous-green light which illuminated the bleak world eerily.

Again misgivings overtook him. Where were they? Upon what world? Surely they were not in the Solar System, for who had ever imagined such countless little suns, circling the planet instead of being circled. It was utterly amazing. Could this place be in existence between Neptune and Pluto? Surely it was unheard of.

But the atmosphere was breathable, though Jimmy became aware of an odor like over-ripe fruit and flowers. He lost no time for cogitations and made his way warily over the glass-sharp rocks down toward what appeared to be a lake in the distance.

It was farther away than he thought. He stumbled down dark fissures, along steep ledgeways, soon losing sight of the spaceship as he climbed swiftly downward. Once a huge scaled body rattled eerily in the duskness of a grotto, scales rattling on stones. He stopped; seized the handle of the ray-gun at his belt, but as no further attacking move was made, he was about to pass on.

Then he saw jewel-green eyes in a huge scaly head, and a huge forked tongue, flitting out wickedly. He raced on past the cave mouth down the ledge, grasping the ray-gun in readiness.

Below was the ever increasing sparkle of blue liquid. He was going down a narrow gulley now, which twisted tortuously between high precipitous walls which hid the suns.

He heard a noise behind, and his marrow froze. He paused; fearful eyes to the rear. He could see nothing, but an ominous slithering sound came faintly to his ears, like a bag of beans being dragged over a road.

He was being pursued. The horrible monster he had but faintly viewed, of the fascinating jewel-like eyes and slithering tongue, had raised itself from the cave to give pursuit. A cold resignation came over Jimmy. He realized there was no alternative. Returning up the trail he would have to kill the monster to reach Gorgon's side with the water.

Turning, he hastily made his way down the gulley, which opened suddenly out upon a beach. He paused, astounded.

Though the body of water was nothing more than a huge lake, the waves were of terrifying height, due no doubt to the pull of countless suns above. A terrific roaring of waters, of waves fully two hundred feet high, which had been deadened in the grotto, now smote his ears. A huge wave lashed up, struck the rocky beach, and its fine spray cast a rainbow-seething of foam against the blazing suns in the skies. The spray drenched Jimmy Dane with fine moisture, but he would yet have to proceed far down the beach to get his container filled with water.

Before the next wave struck, he ran, scurrying like a rabbit down the smooth water-worn trail to a short pinnacle of rock which shelved into deep water. He clutched the pinnacle, which was squirming with slimy water-slugs, and waited, while the wave broke and seethed up like an ava-

lanche. It tugged at his body and strangled him with foam, but as it retreated, Jimmy still held to the pinnacle and his bucket was filled with water.

He spit water and cursed as a slug bit his wrist. Flinging the loathesome creature from him, he ran back up the smooth shelving beach.

● Suddenly, above the roaring and booming of the surf, Captain Jimmy Dane heard a high piercing scream. It raised the hair on the nape of his neck; it was so penetrating that it cut through him like a knife.

Human! That was it, it had sounded human, here upon this bizarre world of the unknown. Jimmy whirled, his back against the bluff, and stared down the smooth sloping beach-front. He caught a blur of action; figures running, a hand-to-hand conflict.

There was a man down there, right enough. One man, lone-handed against a horde of creatures, slim segmented monsters like armadillos walking upright. The man was valiantly striking out with both fists, but the armadillo-men, reinforced by others running around a bend, would soon vanquish him. The armadillo-men gave vent to shrill bark-like cries as they cornered their victim.

It was too much for Jimmy. Seizing his ray-projector from his belt, he leaped down and into the fray. For a moment he forgot Bull Gorgon. Here was a real man! One who dared fight against twenty. Jimmy knew that he could drive the armadillo-men back easily with his ray-gun, then he could run to the rescue of Bull Gorgon.

Shouting cries of encouragement, he leaped upon the scene, with great leaps and bounds which clearly made it obvious that the gravity was slight, that he weighed much less here than upon earth.

"Give it to 'em, buddy!" he shouted, though he knew the man could not understand him. He was a lithe young fellow, clad in a strange furry garment not unlike the golden fuzzy covering of bumblebees.

Whee! Striking out like a sword, the keen purple blade of light left the ray-gun, cutting a hot path of air across the intervening space. The armadillo-men had sighted him.

With huge snouts slavering foam, they sprang toward the new intruder, exhibiting long sabre-like fangs and snarling with incredible ferocity. Spang! Right across the chest of the foremost one, the blue-light blade cut. The hideous fellow turned around in mid-air without a single sound, slumping to the ground. Almost instantaneously, the two directly behind him sprang into the blue death-ray, to be instantly disintegrated.

But there was one, directly between Jimmy and the struggling man, whom he dared not fire at. Screeching triumphantly, the armadillo-creature sprang, sailed like a flying squirrel, claws outstretched and fangs open. He was a fearsome sight. His claw raked Jimmy's shoulder, tearing away the metal-mesh and raking his shoulder to the bone. Jimmy lashed out with a fist and smacked him aside. The armadillo-man bunted off to the sand with a crushed rib. The look of surprise faded from his features and he was up in a flash. But this time Jimmy was ready, and the death-ray cut him to squirming fragments.

The golden-furred man had now sighted his rescuer, and his large golden eyes flashed a look of hope as he tore away from his assailants and sprang toward Jimmy.

Jimmy ran forward, sweeping the armadillo-men around the fugitive, but failing to score a hit upon those directly behind. Then the fugitive, puffing furiously, ran quickly past and beyond Jimmy. The remaining armadillo-men, coming like the wind, sailed plump into Jimmy. The ray-gun was torn from his hand and went spinning into the air, to alight in the lake. Its flashing sword of light whirled by chance and cut down one of the three remaining armadillo-men.

Jimmy was down. His chances for life were instantaneously diminished by the loss of the ray-gun. Slavering jaws snapped at him, and claws raked his breast. He was in a hand-to-hand battle with this ferocious creature of another world. Hot fetid breath gusted out by the armadillo-man stank in his nostrils.

● *Crash!* His fist, unloosed for the first time, smacked into the huge jaw just as it opened for his throat. He tore away—but the creature renewed the attack with lightning-like rapidity. Rolling and tumbling, they struggled down the sloping beach, tearing and striking at each other. A lashing wave hit them, tore them apart just when Jimmy thought it was going to snap his leg in two.

Again they came together. Jimmy reached out and seized the huge jaws. By locking his legs, he managed to clamber upon the creature's back. Then he bent the jaws around, slowly, exerting all his strength. The armadillo-man, desperate, wrestled and threshed, jarring Jimmy against the sand. Suddenly a bone snapped like a stick of wood and the creature relaxed in Jimmy's arms.

Jimmy leaped to his feet. The fuzzy-robed stranger had finished his own assailant and stood several feet away, looking curiously at the battle. When Jimmy arose, he smiled, though his leathery-parched face was furry and scarcely human. Jimmy smiled back. The golden stranger pointed excitedly back the way he had come and jabbered with swift syllables. From the distance came muffled barks and snarls of the armadillo-men. At any moment they would burst upon them, a full horde of the strange creatures.

Jimmy understood. He pointed swiftly up the bluff, conveying the idea to the man that they would flee thither, though of course the strange being could not know a space-ship lay there.

Laughing as best as he could with what breath he had left, Jimmy ran up the beach with the golden stranger. Jimmy's mind seemed overpalled by a hazy vision. He ran back to where he had left the water and picked it up. The stranger jabbered excitedly, urging him to greater speed.

Then they struggled on up the beach. Jimmy knew that they could not face the monstrous scaly thing up the gorge, so he ran farther along, hoping to find some other path.

But he was deeply exhausted. The wound in his shoulder was bleeding profusely and it left a trail of blood across the sand which could be followed easily by the armadillo-men. Ahead of him, the stranger urged him on impatiently.

Jimmy stumbled, but he clung to the water. The man he had rescued paused to stare down the beach. Startlingly clear came the yelping of the armadillo pack. The golden man was eyeing dubiously the trail of blood left by Jimmy.

Suddenly he ejaculated wildly. Before them were two gorges. He indicated that he would take one, Jimmy the other, so as to divide the forces of the assailants. Jimmy nodded and ran on ahead in the direction indicated.

His breath was coming in painful gasps. His feet were cut by sharp stones. Every turn had to be negotiated by painful climbing which shot excruciating pains to the muscles of his body. But he held the water closely, though he leaned often upon the canyon wall to gain his breath.

Then again he heard his pursuers, their cries echoing hollowly up the sides of the gorge. With a new burst of speed he ran on between the precipitous walls.

Suddenly he stumbled to a stop. A high wall of rock confronted him. At neither side was there escape. A tiny trickle of water, cascading from a height far above had worn the gorge into a natural *cul-de-sac*. Jimmy sagged weakly to the rough ground. Behind him came wild cries, and he saw the stream of tell-tale blood which led inevitably upward.

Suddenly he realized why the golden stranger had parted ways. That trail of blood would lead to Jimmy with every surety. Doubtless the armadillo-men had passed by the other opening, since that crimson trail led by it. The golden man was probably safe by this time, climbing out upon the bluff-top and laughing about the trick he had played upon his rescuer. Jimmy cursed him long and hopelessly.

This was the thanks he got for saving the other's life. Well, he would sell his life dearly.

The first armadillo-head poked around the gorge got a heavy glassy boulder square between the eyes, crushing his skull. But others came on heedlessly, and they poured upon him, savage, cruel monsters with gleaming fangs.

Jimmy lashed left and right, though his blows lacked punch. They were upon him now, tearing at his body from all sides. This was the end. There would be no mercy. Jimmy fell back against a boulder, and before his stunned brain could realize, he was down, his arms and legs bound by cords.

CHAPTER III

A Victim for Sacrifice

Dimly, he realized that they were not going to kill him outright, after all. One of the armadillo-men secured a bough from one of the hard, stony trees, and they lashed their captive's feet and hands around the bough. Then, supporting it between them, they began the steep descent of the narrow gorge.

The cruel bonds bit relentlessly into his flesh. Jimmy knew no hope; for it was only with cruel and hating eyes that the armadillo-men looked upon him. They poked him with sharp stone knives and spat upon him when he bounced against an outcropping of rock; so he knew that he was but being spared for some new horror. Thoughts of Bull Gorgon, alone and helpless, probably senseless, sent a vague chill of horror down his spine. He was alone and helpless, with no hope in any direction. Even from the golden men-like creatures of this strange domain he could expect no succor, for had not one of their number already treacherously betrayed him? Tears of savage hate came to his eyes when he thought of the craven cowardice of the golden man. Only arrant cowardice could have allowed the golden one to play such a trick on him.

Jimmy knew he had been the victim of abject betrayal. First Bull Gorgon, whom he had trusted and then a man who had been spared by Jimmy's own efforts. Futile rage gripped Jimmy. If he could only escape, he would spend his life hunting them down. Had he not gone down to the lake in the guise of a good Samaritan, he would never have encountered these savage armadillo-men.

The armadillo-men had s u d d e n l y emerged upon the smooth, rocky beach, and the loud roar of the surf boomed in Jimmy's ears. Chattering among themselves, the armadillo creatures walked casually along the rim of the beach, back in the direction from whence they had come. Several times they passed the mouths of black chasms, and Jimmy's imagination almost led him to believe that he heard the same scaly rattling as of a bag of beans being dragged along the road. He now opened his eyes and sought to memorize landmarks. Presently the smoothly worn trail which his captors followed turned into a gorge. The armadillo-men were agile as cats. Rocky cliff-walls hemmed in either side, oftimes hiding the numerous tiny blazing suns which were whirling by above.

When his captors surmounted the bluff, Jimmy strained his eyes in all directions, but could see no signs of the space-ship. Now they were entering the floor of what had once been a gigantic crater. Numerous pinnacles of black rock stuck jagged teeth up from the floor like stalagmites. A spidery bridgework had been swung across the valley floor, using the stalagmites for supports, and though it swayed and rocked, it kept the feet of the captors from the rocky floor, which resembled fields of broken glittering glass. The bridgework mutely attested to the intelligence of his captors, who, though being extremely bestial in appearance, must certainly possess a mentality of a sort.

At the other end of the crater, a high jutting buttress, unscalable and inaccessible, loomed darkly. The trail led to its base and the dark tunnel mouth gaped widely. As they approached, the armadillo-men halloed, and from behind a rock before the tunnel mouth poked an armadillo-head. This armadillo-man was probably stationed there as a guard, for after a few spoken salutations, his captors pushed forward into the tunnel mouth and

ascended straight into the mountain. Jimmy memorized the position of the sentry in view of a later escape, even though the hope for one was slight. Nevertheless, the sentry very clearly revealed that the armadillo-men were nearing their abode.

After traversing for long minutes through impenetrable gloom, Jimmy saw a faint light ahead. Uttering shouts of triumph, his captors hurried their steps. Answering cries came from the opening, and as they hurried out from the tunnel upon a ledge in a cliff-side, a crowd of armadillo-men surged up excitedly to view the captive.

Shouting wildly to attract attention, the warriors stood the pole on end to exhibit their captive. It also enabled Jimmy to get a view of the valley, or rather the great chasm which lay around and before him in a gigantic cup. The chasm was at least a mile across, and perhaps a mile in depth. Vast pinnacles stood up from the floor like pillars, and Jimmy noticed curious huts jutting out on the cliff-sides like wasps' nests. These huts were rounded, and appeared to be made of a substance closely resembling hard clay. A peaked conical roof surmounted each one. These curious huts clung to every available spot on the cliff walls and upon the stone pillars stretching from the cavern floor.

Walkways and ledgeways webbed the cliff. A lacework of swinging bridges and walks swung out from walls to the pinnacles, giving a gossamer look of intricate webwork to the valley.

● Then Jimmy stared. Cut into one of the cliffs of the great chasm was a gigantic figure—an idol—of grotesque ugliness. It was the gigantic imagery of an armadillo-woman, with her huge palms cupped together in her lap, while her legs were spread apart so that each leg ran in different directions along the cliff edge. Jimmy stared, horrified. These savage beasts were idol-worshippers. Only thousands of years of deep-set fanaticism could have driven them to construct the barbaric carving upon the opposite cavern wall. Even as he looked, the gigantic and fearsome face of the idol moved; grinning, to display huge gleaming fangs.

Was he dreaming? No, the huge idol had moved. The huge gross lips seemed suspended on some inner axis. And as it moved, the thousands of countless armadillo men and women, of every conceivable shape and size, knelt and hid their heads, whether they were clinging precariously to some ledge or clinging to the spidery bridges suspended over the void.

"Kuschab! Ah! Kuschab!" they all chorused in unison. By their intonation, Jimmy knew that they were invoking their savage god.

At this, Jimmy's captors began to leap about, beating their chests with clenched claws and screaming ferociously into the air. Thousands of armadillo-men watched them with admiring eyes. Jimmy could see that his captors were telling their god of the capture, of the fight, and of how brave they had been. One old armadillo-man even rolled around on the rocks as he pictured the fight. And all the while it seemed the giant idol *Kuschab* stared on knowingly. A feeling of vast awe thrilled down Jimmy's spine. The idol seemed alive and animate.

Suddenly the captors ceased their gyrations. They froze, kneeling and holding their arms before them as if in an offering to their god. A vast awe and quiet filled the chasm. Not a breath could be heard, and the wind, swirling past cavern mouths and along jagged pinnacles, whistled weirdly, as if the great god was musing pensively.

Jimmy sensed his position; he was being offered as a sacrifice to the great god. He gazed in horror as the great lips gleamed hungrily again. Even the eyes of the idol stared open widely and avariciously at the captive on the ledge across the chasm. There was no doubt but that *Kuschab* accepted the morsel offered him. Wildly the armadillo-men screamed and waved their arms in delight.

Again carrying Jimmy, they made their way downward, over ledges, over numerous swinging bridgeways, through tunnels, through the floor pinnacles, until they finally reached a cavern where they dumped Jimmy roughly.

● Hours passed by, and it seemed that the wild exultation outside the cavern mouth increased uproariously. Jimmy lay in a half-dazed condition upon the hard floor, his ankles and wrists cut by thongs and the rough pole to which he was bound. A guard was stationed at the door of the cavern.

Then they again came for him. The blazing light from the countless suns flashing high overhead had not abated, so Jimmy could not estimate the interval of time that had passed, though he knew it must have been hours. The cavern floor was thronged with armadillo-men who shouted and laughed as they sighted the helpless captive, swung on a pole by his captors. Across a gigantic drooping bridgeway straight into the idol's lap, where the great cupped hands lay, they carried him. Within the cupped hands was a dark stained stone. Its color attested to the blood which had dripped down its surface.

As Jimmy was laid, pole and all, across the sacrificial stone, a doorway in the idol's bosom opened and a gayly caparisoned priest emerged, arms aloft, bearing a gleaming stone knife. Feathers and golden scales bedecked his priestly appearance.

At his appearance, Jimmy's captors fell to hands and knees. The priest halted above the captive, knife upraised. Behind him, droning from infinity it seemed, came the supplication of the armadillo-men to their god. *"Kuschab! Ab! Kuschab! Ab!"*

A flitting instant passed; the priest upright, in which a brief survey of his life ran through Jimmy's mind. He thought he was doomed as the priest knelt, but a moment later he felt the priest cutting his bonds, and as he turned his face upward the idol winked at him.

Was this madness? Had his mind slipped? Was this simply a capricious jest? But no, for the idol was winking again.

Jimmy rubbed his wrists and ankles and gazed questioningly at the high priest, who had withdrawn for a few feet. Was Jimmy going to be released? The priest droned an incantation to his god, his arms outspread. Long moments followed. Then suddenly the armadillo-men from behind leaped upon Jimmy and threw him face up upon the altar. Now the priest stepped forward, snarling. A roar of approval leaped from countless throats in the chasm.

Jimmy's horrified eyes stared upward, straight into the colossal grinning face above him. The great stone teeth seemed almost to slaver, and the eyes of the giant winked and blinked hungrily.

Suddenly Jimmy froze. Something in the irregularity of the winking of the idol caught his attention. That was it—the irregularity. Suddenly he was counting slowly.

"Letters!" he gasped. "Letters! That's what they are. 'Altar,' it just spelled altar!"

He stared upward, fascinated, unaware of the shouting multitude. "Ray-gun behind Altar!" he read. "Ray-gun behind Altar!" Repeatedly. Written in Morse code.

CHAPTER IV

Back to Earth

● Jimmy's groping hand strayed to the base of the stone, slipped back along the rough edge. Lucky for him that they had loosed him; his hands slipped into a crevice and closed over the smooth grip of a ray-gun.

Suddenly the incantation of the priest above reached a crescendo. Screeching hideously, he drove the knife downward, but now the sons of *Kuschab* witnessed something that had never been witnessed before. The captive writhed sidewise under the descending knife, and the priest howled as it dug into the altar. There was a keen whine, a flash of blue, and the priest himself lay slashed across his own altar, dying.

Springing swiftly to his feet, Jimmy sought to bring the ray-gun into play. But his muscles were cramped and stiff. The armadillo-men, their initial surprise gone, leaped upon him. Jimmy lashed out—and the ray-gun was gone, rolling across the rocks.

He hit out wildly; his fist connected, and one of them went down. Claws were reaching out, grabbing at him. He wrestled free and fled back, but they were upon him,

pushing him back against the wall. Knives gleamed and cruel fangs were exposed ragingly. There would be no quarter now! The captive must be slaughtered now, a sacrifice to the great god *Kuschab*.

Socko! An armadillo-man swept backward, and his head crushed like an eggshell against the altar. *Spat!* There another one went reeling! Someone had sprung out of the door from the idol's bosom like a jack-in-the-box.

There was a sheen on a silvery metal tunic. A brief instant—a rocket and shooting-star emblem swept across Jimmie's vision.

It was like a flood of icy water. His brain was cleared. His muscles were again springy as steel, and the blood rushed into his arms, sweeping away the awkward numbness.

Shouting, he ploughed into the armadillo-men like a mill-wheel, and they went down. Another mill-wheel was turning at the other edge. No ray-guns were used, just fists. Jimmy seized a claw coming toward him, jerked the man off balance and swung him bodily, back into his fellows.

And while thousands of the armadillo-men watched, two men in sheeny metallic tunics cleaned up a score of armadillo-men who were on the gigantic cupped hands of their great god *Kuschab*.

Jimmy met the other mill-wheel, and as the creatures fell aside like wheat, he found himself grinning into the flushed face of a huge grinning Gorgon.

"Yee-ooww!" yelled Gorgon. "C'mon, Jimmy!" And he raced back to the doorway into the idol. A priest was coming down an inner stairway. Gorgon, with two hundred and fifty pounds of tough meat behind a horny fist, crushed his face, smacked him neatly across the corridor, and sent his soul howling into the arms of his great god *Kuschab* of the nether world.

Together the earth-men raced up the stairway, as joyful as boys. Two raggedly clad men; yet each bore that proud *Rocket and Shooting-Star* emblem on his breast. Men of the Earth-Guard! That emblem was feared and respected the universe over. From Mercury to Pluto, savage creatures would some day cower at sight of it. For what they saw was not the shining silvery emblem, but a vision behind, of young men laughing in the face of death, fighting to the last step, shouting defiantly as they died, for the freedom and protection of liberty and earth.

Jimmy felt all this. Tears of wild pride came to his eyes. And one by one as they met the priests, they cut them down, even though they delayed their flight and a wild mob was streaming after them. They flung the priests headlong down the flights at their pursuers, laughed defiantly, and raced on.

After climbing many stairs, they came into a room directly behind the face of the idol, where the levers and attachments were which worked the eyes and mouth. Three dead priests lay strewn about, mutely attesting the fact that for some brief moments Gorgon had manipulated the levers.

● A huge globular container marked with red crosses and a cross and skull, was sitting snugly behind the great lip of the idol. Jimmy recognized it. It was a quantity of the powerful explosive *Blationite* which had been on the space-ship. Gorgon threw a time trigger on its exterior mechanism and laughed.

"Now we sure gotta scram!" he bellowed to Jimmy. "In five minutes, this world's gonna rock in its cradle, believe me!"

A last flight of steps led out into the open, upon the jagged cliff-top above the chasm's rim, beneath the countless blazing suns of this barbaric world. In the jumbled piles of black rock and weird crystalline tree-growths perched a squat metal monster. Its face was rugged and patched; a battle-scarred victim. A huge section had been peeled off her side, revealing the inner metal lining. It was only after some moments that Jimmy recognized their patrol boat.

"That's her!" laughed Bull Gorgon, wiping blood from a wound over his eye. "That's her! I cut off a section of the outer lining and welded it across the prow where

the glassite should be. I welded the crack up too."

"What," cried Jimmy delightedly. "Is she fixed up and ready for travel?"

"Fit as a fiddle!" cried Gorgon. "She'll do, being air-tight now. But this is no time to talk, boy! Hell's going to pop in just a few seconds now."

Jimmy scrambled after Gorgon into the open airlock in the side of their reconditioned space-ship. The prow was dark and the control-boards were hardly visible. A periscopic device temporarily rigged up enabled the pilot to look in an eyepiece which was relayed by mirrors to a side port-hole, just as a submarine operator looks out over the water.

"Here we go!" cried Gorgon, slamming over a lever, and Jimmy saw the rugged terrain of the mysterious world fall swiftly away. Suddenly, the cliff-edge seemed to crumble, and the particles heaved outward and down into the chasm. Jimmy knew that the god *Kuschab* had ceased to exist, and he hoped its destruction would cause the cruel cult to become extinct. He had very narrowly escaped with his life, and had it not been for the almost miraculous efforts of Bull Gorgon, he would surely have died. A lump came into Jimmy's throat, and tears to his eyes as he stared over at the huge fellow before the controls, whose metal-mesh clothes were hanging by shreds. Blood oozed from creases on either side of the huge massive neck. Beneath the tangled mass of hair, the scarred rugged moon-face, across which were several cuts and abrasions which would leave more scars, was grinning contentedly.

"You sure were in the nick of time!" ejaculated Jimmy. "Another minute—and blooey! Man, you can imagine my astonishment when I saw that idol was winking code!"

"Yes, I was operating it. You see I woke up, found myself alone, and saw your tracks leading off down the cliff-side. I followed for some distance, then I came upon a ghastly sight. A great lizard creature was eating a man."

"A golden sort of fellow?" queried Jimmy.

"Right."

"I'm glad he got it, the dirty bum!" he cried, telling Gorgon of his own experience, of his rescuing the golden man, and his subsequent betrayal.

"Well, he got his," declared Gorgon with a grimace. "When I seen that slithering monster I betook myself back. I decided that I'd better patch up the ship before I searched for you.

"Well, you can guess the rest. After I had repaired the ship I scouted around and happened to see that party of overgrown ant-eaters carrying you to their kingdom in the chasm. I hovered over, saw the offering that they were making to the idol. When that big lip of the idol moved on a lever I got an idea. Well, I just went down, kayoed a few priests, and waited for the proper moment. I sneaked down and placed a ray-gun by the altar. Then I went back up to the control room, intending to signal you. Well, I finally managed to, just in the nick of time. You know the rest."

That was all Gorgon said; for he was a quiet, reserved man despite his bulk. Jimmy suddenly realized what the man had gone through, reviving to find himself alone, working feverishly to weld the ship air-tight again, and last but not least, venturing down into the idol and laying out the priests.

Emotion surged up within Jimmy. He went over to Gorgon and laid a hand on his arm.

"Well, Bull Gorgon, you old ugly ogre," he said affectionately. "We're here in a place where I don't know! I never heard of a place with so many suns. And since we'll probably never get back to Mother Earth again, I'm going to say something. I've been a fool! You're the finest pal a guy ever had!"

Gorgon laughed.

"Take a look," he invited, relinquishing the eyepiece of the periscope attachment. Jimmy stared through. He saw the sun blazing, big and wholesome; not the thousand green suns, but the great golden sun of the Solar System. Also, not far away,

was a glimpse of a green little planet which could be nothing else than the earth. Jimmy gasped.

"Why, we were out near Pluto!" he gasped. "How'd we get back—"

Gorgon was figuring swiftly with a stylus on a pad.

"See here," he cried. "We've been gone from our universe, as we know it, for about four hours. When we left that other space we had drifted for 172,800 miles. That is 12 miles a second! Do you see what I'm driving at? Our universe is moving at the rate of 12 miles a second across space.

"But this other universe we blundered into is motionless. Its laws are different. Instead of planets circling suns, the planet we landed on was moveless and suns circled it.

"See here. In some of Einstein's computations, he compared actual visible, that is the space in our universe relative to it, to the absolute space or vacuum, the space which is immovable, through which our own space is drifting at 12 miles a second. He drew a line between space relative to the universe, and the absolute space through which our universe moves as a whole.

"Do you see? This absolute space, which may be compared to the fabric of a screen over which moving picture images are flashing, was also inhabited—but these worlds which occupy it are governed by different physical laws than that of our own universe.

"So, figuratively speaking, we crossed the Einstein line of distinction into the absolute space, which was really occupied by matter totally different from the matter of our own universe, with different physical laws."

"But how do you account for our passing from our space into the other, the absolute space?" queried Jimmy.

Bull Gorgon shrugged. "I am no mathematician," he answered. "Perhaps we moved across an intersection of two planes, that is, if we could call our space one plane and the other space the other, though each is highly complex."

● After this, both were silent for a time. Then:

"Temperature's up," commented Gorgon dryly. "That outer hull I stripped off to patch up the prow destroyed the vacuum dead space and friction is heating us up considerably. Shall we dare a run to Earth, or stop at Mars to repair?"

"Let 'er be Earth," he cried, "on one consideration. That you forget all I said about that gravy deal, and also what I said about transferring."

"Okay," grinned Bull Gorgon, turning to grasp Jimmy's hand with a long look of understanding. "It was the long monotony that caused that quarrel. I said some things I'm sorry for, too!"

And, grasping the crushing hand of the other man, Jimmy realized that again his soul was at rest. That friendship which bound these two men of the Earth-Guard together was a deep mystic thing which few others could even fathom, much less understand.

THE END

IN THE NEW SIZE

● WE HOPE you will like, and approve of changing back WONDER STORIES into the smaller size. After several years of experimenting, we believe we have come to the final shape of the magazine, for the following reasons:

Practically ninety-nine per cent of the pulp magazines today are of the smaller size. It is a fact that when we changed from the smaller to the larger size two years ago, we had not only lost sales on the magazine, but many of our readers disapproved of the larger size. When we changed back to the larger size in November, 1931, we experimented with a better paper and thought by dressing up the magazine it would find additional readers. These hopes were not realized. To the contrary, despite the fact of investing a small fortune in making the change, the sales dropped, so we are back to where we were over a year ago, and as far as we are concerned, you may have our assurance that the change is final.

We hope you will like the magazine in the handier and smaller size, and, of course, nothing has been lost, as you get the same amount of reading matter as before.

Now tell us frankly what you think of it.

—*The Editor.*

The Lunar Consul

By Sidney Patzer

(Continued from page 335)

"Have you seen any outlines, say? In mirrors, or something?"

Hermann unloosed his bellowing laughter.

"No, young sir, I have not." He sobered with German sympathy, and added, "I will try, however. With mirrors."

At the table, the roar of Hermann's voice drowned out the rest.

"Our friend Lawson," he boomed, "has experienced 'the minute of silence.'"

Hammersmith and Vane both showed interest.

"So you have been initiated into the m u t e s' organization?" Hammersmith asked.

"Yes," Lawson replied. "It seemed incredible."

Guglielmo alone showed any sign of surprise, and addressed Lawson directly for the first time since his formal introduction. He glanced up from his moody contemplation of the dish before him at Hermann's announcement, and asked:

"Where were you, if I may ask?"

"I was with Miss Henderson near the force-wall to the south," Lawson replied. "Why?"

Guglielmo sat silent for a moment, then said, simply: "Thank you," and retired once again into his shell.

"It had to come sooner or later," Vane said. "No harm done."

"Is Guglielmo always like that?" Lawson inquired of Hammersmith.

"Pardon me again," Guglielmo said, in his peculiarly unsibilant English. "What time was it when it happened?"

Lawson glanced at the girl.

"A little over an hour ago, wasn't it?" Madeleine nodded.

"You don't know exactly? You didn't note the time?"

Lawson looked at the girl again.

"No," he said. "I didn't think to look."

"Ah," the Italian said, drumming his fingers on the table-top. "I'm sorry to have disturbed you."

"Not at all," Lawson returned, puzzled. The time and the place, he thought. He had slipped there.

(Concluded next month)

The Man With X-Ray Eyes

By Edmond Hamilton

(Continued from page 393)

David Winn stood quite motionless outside the door for some moments. Then he turned, and with his face white and strange, went softly down the stairs.

● The police sergeant that night was explaining to Dr. Homer as he led him back along a corridor to the morgue-room.

"We found your name and address in his pocket when we fished his body out of the river, and thought maybe you could identify him," he was saying.

Dr. Homer stepped into the morgue-room, and as the sheet was thrown back he looked steadily at the drowned man.

He lay with body tensed, and with one hand flung palm-outward against his face, across his eyes.

"Funny thing about that arm," the sergeant remarked. "When we found him, his hand was up in front of his eyes like that and we couldn't move it away.

"Looks just like he was trying to keep from seeing something, doesn't it?"

Dr. Homer nodded sadly as he looked at David Winn. "He was trying to keep from seeing everything. For he saw everything just as he wanted to, and it was too much for him.

"God keep us blind in this world! Prevent us from the horror of doing what he did, of seeing—too well."

THE END

Science Questions and Answers

THIS department is conducted for the benefit of readers who have pertinent queries on modern scientific facts. As space is limited, we cannot undertake to answer more than three questions for each letter. The flood of correspondence received makes it impractical, also, to print answers as soon as we receive questions. However, questions of general interest will receive careful attention.

THE ASSOCIATE SCIENCE EDITORS OF WONDER STORIES

are nationally-known educators who pass upon the scientific principles of all stories.

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Curator, The American Museum of Natural History
Professor William J. Luyten, Ph.D.
University of Minnesota.

ASTROPHYSICS
Donald H. Menzel, Ph.D.
Harvard College Observatory.

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Air Corps Reserve, Professor Aeronautical Engineering, Iowa State College.
Professor Earl D. Hay, S.B., M.S., M.E.
Head Department Mechanical and Industrial Engineering and Professor of Aeronautics, University of Kansas.
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Dr. Marjorie E. Babcock.
Acting Director, Psychological Clinic, University of Hawaii.

ZOOLOGY
Dr. Joseph G. Yoshioka.
Yale University.

Elements, Alcyone, and Wave-lengths

Editor, Science Questions and Answers:

1. I would like to know the atomic weight of elements 43, 61, 75, 85, and 87, if they have been determined?

2. What is the distance of the star Alcyone in the Pleiades, and what is its size compared to the sun?

3. What electro-magnetic radiation has the shortest wave-length?

ROSS WHITWORTH,
Springfield, Mo.

(1. Atomic weights of the elements masurium (43), illinium (61), alabamine (85) and virginium (87) are not definitely known; but would be somewhere near 98.6, 147.5, 216 and 224, respectively. There is uncertainty with unknown elements, because of their isotopes, or forms chemically alike with different nuclei; virginium is thought to have six isotopes. The atomic weight of rhenium (75) is 186.3.

2. Alcyone, principal star of the cluster called the Pleiades, is around 300 light-years away, and more than two hundred times brighter than the sun.

3. The cosmic rays which are most penetrating are believed to have the shortest wave-lengths of any radiation. They have lately been found, according to Kolhorster, to be so powerful that they can penetrate half a mile of water.—EDITOR.)

Air on the Moons

Editor, Science Questions and Answers:

Is there any air on the moons of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune?

DONALD WESTLAKE INGERSOL,
Roanoke, Va.

(No one really knows whether the moons of the planets you mention have an atmosphere or not, and there are opinions pro and con as to the possibilities of such a condition. It is generally believed, however, that of all the outer planets and their moons, Ganymede, the largest moon of Jupiter, has the greatest gravity, and is, therefore, best fitted to retain an atmosphere capable of sustaining life. It is larger than Mercury and smaller than Mars. Like its companion, Callisto, writers assume, it may be habitable and may receive a great quantity of heat from Jupiter, the largest planet in the solar system. Jupiter is thought to still be in a [illegible]ten or liquid state, and one theory puts forth the idea that Jupiter was once the twin of our sun. Astronomers, however, generally think Jupiter very cold.—EDITOR.)

Space Navigation and Time

Editor, Science Questions and Answers:

I have been an interested reader for some months, and I can honestly say that your stories are the best science fiction I have ever read. Having read so much of interplanetary travel, I am prompted to ask one or two questions:

Suppose a space ship has left the earth's gravitational field; according to science it becomes weightless. Now, the space ship, presumably, would be fitted with a magnetic floor which would, of course, attract all steel articles; but what would happen to anything non-magnetic, such as food when consumed by the occupants? Is there a method by which artificial gravity can be obtained?

In nearly all space-travel stories, the space ships are propelled by rocket tubes in the rear of the vessel. Surely, once the ship is out in space, owing to its momentum and the absence of friction, further propulsion would be unnecessary; the ship continuing at the same velocity until checked. According to your authors, however, it appears that their space ships require continuous acceleration until they come under the gravitational force of another planet. I should like to be enlightened on this point.

Time travel is another thing that strikes me as fantastic. How can anything solid possibly travel along something abstract? I fail to see how anyone can harness something which really isn't there.

F. A. BEAL,
Thorpe Bay, Essex, England.

(The problems of life in a space ship, and of producing artificial gravity, were very thoroughly discussed in the July and August, 1929, numbers of SCIENCE WONDER STORIES by Capt. Herman Noordung, a German engineer, who is a recognized authority in this matter. Special arrangements would be necessary for life in a weightless condition; special technique for eating and drinking, where liquids could not be poured in the ordinary manner. We do not know as yet what the effect, on the human body, of a weightless condition would be; but all authorities have assumed that we could become accustomed to it, as sailors do to the motion of a vessel. It is also possible, theoretically, to create a little world in space, where weight would be produced, not by gravity, as on our earth, but by repulsion from the center of a revolving "house." In this case, passengers would stand with their heads toward the axis of the space-ship, rather than away from it.

As to the propulsion of space-ships by rockets, it is true that a few minutes' operation of rockets would suffice to "liberate" a ship from the attraction of our earth; that is, although the ship would continually lose speed in its escape from the earth, it would never actually fall back. The ship would, however, be still traveling in an orbit around the sun, differing from that of the earth by the force and direction of the impulse imparted by the rockets while the space-ship was leaving the earth.

For a trip to the moon, the rockets could be shut off after the first fifteen minutes, and only turned on see the sun rise or set more than once in a day. The philosophical discussions of time traveling, of course, are apart from the problems of navigation in space. —EDITOR.)

Maximum Speed of Light

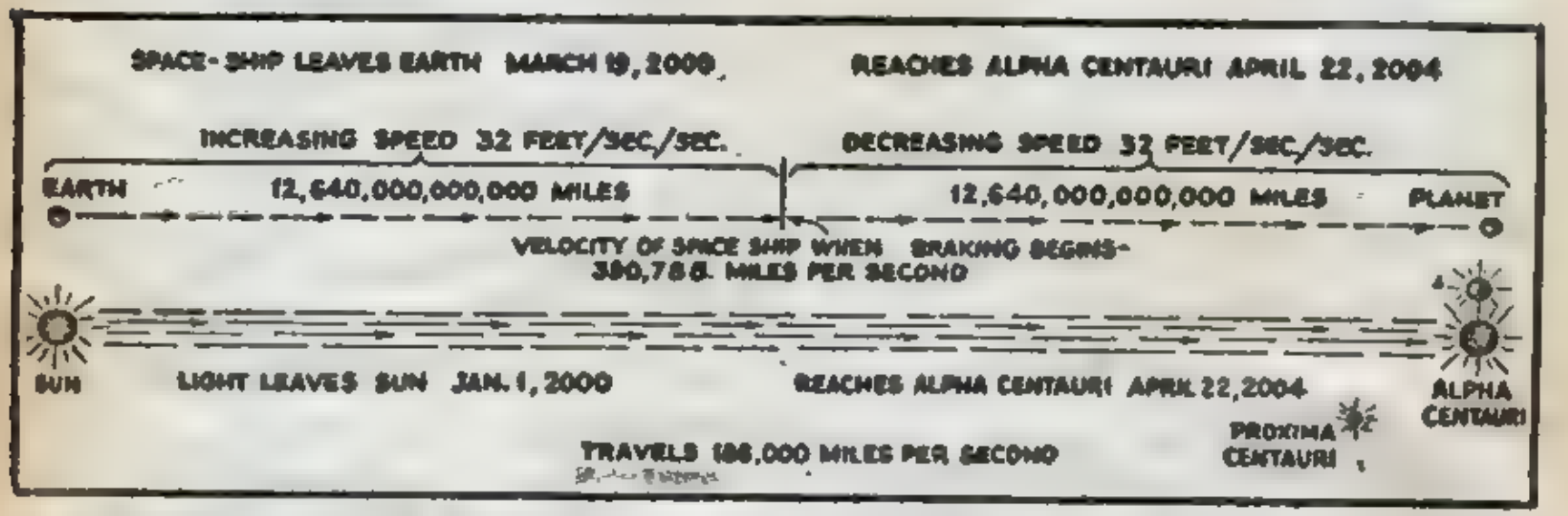
Editor, Science Questions and Answers:

1. If you were on a ship going at the speed of light, and sent out a beam of light from a searchlight on the ship, would the beam go faster than light, or go backwards?

2. Can you foretell a person's death by lines of the palm?

3. What is the —— Tensor? Can you supply the name?

WILLIAM PASTON,
Springfield, Missouri.



If we could keep continuously increasing a space-ship's speed, at a rate which would produce the effect of normal gravity, and at the middle point decrease it (which would also produce the effect of gravity in the opposite direction) we might reach a nearby star in a period within the reasonable span of human life. But we would have to bring up our velocity until it exceeded that of light; and therefore we would see light that left our solar system before we did—in other words, look into the past. (The figures are very approximate, but give the idea.)

again when it became necessary to make a landing. But, if we were desirous of visiting the planet Jupiter, which never comes within 360 million miles of the earth, we would have to take TIME into consideration. If we left the earth at a speed of 36,500 feet a second, our speed at forty million miles out (the orbit of Mars) would be cut down to 365 feet a second; and at the orbit of Jupiter it would be less than a third of that. A little calculation will show that, at this rate, we could not reach Jupiter in a thousand years.

Therefore the writers of stories which describe trips to the outer planets in a few months must assume that the rockets are used very extensively during the voyage to increase speed; and they must also assume that the rockets use radioactive or atomic fuel, instead of any now known.

If we were able to visit the star system Alpha Centauri, which is nearest to the earth, and at a distance of 4¼ light-years (25,000,000,000,000 miles), and assuming that we could maintain earthly gravity by accelerating the space-ship 32 feet per second until we are half-way there—and then decelerating by reducing the speed at 32 feet per second—we would require a little over four years and two months to get there. For two years and more, we will be constantly increasing speed; and for the rest of the time decreasing it. And this rough calculation omits all consideration of relativity; for at the turning point, our speed would be 894,000 miles per second, or more than twice the speed of light.

It will be seen that, in a voyage requiring a speed greater than the velocity of light, we would be actually in the realm of time travel—that is, we would see events of astronomical magnitude repeat themselves, before we left, and after we arrived. So an aviator may

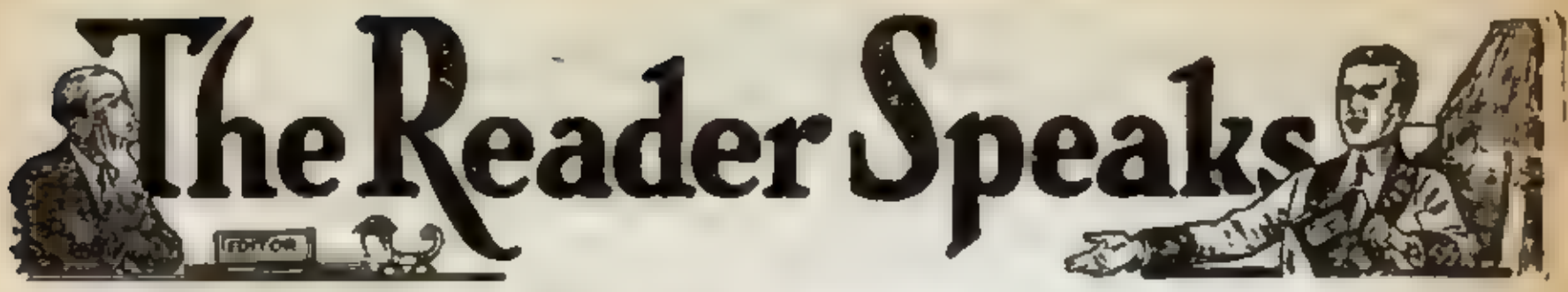
(1. According to relativity, it is impossible for a material object to go at the speed of light; but if it could attain nearly that speed, light emitted by it would arrive at an outside point of observation with the same speed as light from a stationary object.

Without going into relativity, it has been pointed out by Alter that the sound created by a rapidly moving object, such as a shell from a big gun, travels more rapidly at first than that from a stationary object; but the speed of the sound falls off rapidly. We know that projectiles, also, meet with enormously more resistance when they exceed the speed of sound; so that this (about 700 miles an hour) seems to be a natural limit on the speed of aircraft. In other words, air has a natural "velocity of propagation," which is determined by the average speed of its molecules.

If light is transmitted in such a medium of fine particles in a manner not dissimilar, but at a rate nearly a million times greater, then the light of a rapidly moving star might leave the star at a high velocity, but lose it in the course of years—and we see the light of stars only after a lapse of years. As a matter of fact, we have really no way to measure the velocity of light outside the earth's orbit, which occupies a very small part of space.

2. The idea that death, or other future events, can be foretold by the lines and creases of the palm is a piece of pure superstition.

3. We presume you refer to the Riemann-Christoffelsen tensor, which figures in discussions of relativity. The tensors are expressions in higher mathematics, dealing with kinds of "space" which are different from that to which we are accustomed; and cannot well be explained here.—EDITOR.)



IN this department we shall publish every month your opinions. After all, this is your magazine and it is edited for you. If we fall down on the choice of our stories, or if the editorial board slips up occasionally, it is up to you to voice your opinion. It makes no difference whether your letter is complimentary, critical, or whether it contains a good old-fashioned brickbat. All are equally welcome. All of your letters, as much as space will allow, will be published here for the benefit of all. Due to the large influx of mail, no communications to this department are answered individually unless 25c in stamps to cover time and postage is remitted.

Oh, for the Life of an Editor!

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

In the May issue, one William S. Sykora came forth with what he believes is a proof that time traveling is impossible. I, too, am a militant anti-time travelist but do not agree with Mr. Sykora's supposed proof of the impossibility of t.t. He states that a time traveler would upon leaving his starting point take with him some of the mass and energy in the universe, and thereby change the amount of mass and energy in the universe. But such a change is contrary to the principle of the conservation of mass and energy. And Mr. Sykora concludes that time traveling is therefore nothing but a dream. There are two objections to this proof.

In the first place, what does the term "universe" signify? On reading the letter from Mr. Sykora in the January, 1930, issue it appears that he regards the universe as a cylinder, a cylinder of four dimensions, and any cross section of this cylinder represents the universe (in the narrow sense) at some instant of time (time being the fourth dimension of the cylinder). Note that I say "in the narrow sense." By that I mean that the real universe is the sum of all the separate universes which exist at each instant of time. What is usually meant by the term "universe" is the universe that exists at any instant, but the real universe is composed of *all* these separate universes. Now for any particular universe, it may be true that the sum of the mass and energy in it must be a constant. However, the quantity of mass and energy may vary from one universe to another.

Now when the time traveler moves from one point in time to another, he merely transports some mass and energy from one universe to another, the sum total of mass and energy in the real universe, which is the sum of all the individual universes, remaining unaltered. Hence the sacred principle of the conservation of mass and energy is not violated.

But there is another point to be considered. Is that principle as ironbound as is commonly imagined? The very latest trend of scientific thought is away from the principle, for here and there some scientist is found venturing the opinion that the sum of the mass and energy contained in the universe may *not* be constant. That, of course, sadly weakens Mr. Sykora's argument.

As for the law of impenetrability, the efficacy of that as an argument against t.t. depends on other factors besides itself.

While I'm in this disparaging mood, I may as well hurl a few brickbats at other things, among them WONDER STORIES and Ye Editor. At the present time, W. S. is at a far lower level than ever before, in a number of ways. The magazine has degenerated since you returned to the large size about a year and a half ago, and today our magazine has flaws and faults from cover to cover.

In general, the magazine is monotonous. During the first year you published all sorts of articles and had special features which made each issue something to look forward to. Unfortunately that is not true today, every issue is like the preceding, the magazine is becoming stereotyped. For instance, that streamer across the top of the cover has not been varied for months, except once when you replaced it with the title of a story.

Then also on the "Contents" page there are those abominable, those insipid, idiotic, and cheap mangled phrases after each title. It amazes me that no one has as yet protested very vehemently against the use of such phrases. If W. S. is read by persons as intelligent as you claim your readers are, and if the magazine is as high in the scale as you state it to be, then such distorted and puerile attempts to rouse the readers' interest should not be employed, for they are fit only for magazines that cater to morons. Furthermore, those phrases are superfluous, for the editorial comment on the first page of each story suffices. Those editorial comments form one of the few redeeming features of the magazine.

Now the stories. All together . . . . rise and roar a loud "*phooey!*" As a whole, the stories are terrible, or to be fair, were terrible until a few months ago, for recently they show a distinct change for the better. Mr. Schachner's series was excellent, and though it is a shame that he terminated it so soon, had he prolonged it, it would perhaps have degenerated into hack work. Bravo! Mr. Schachner! C. A. Smith's stories are frankly boring. The first few were fine, but there has been nothing new in the last dozen or so. Same plot for each. Manning's series of tales is fair but will turn into a rehashing of the same plot if continued too long. At any rate, the idea of having a series of stories in place of serials is a good one.

The science in the stories is also abominable. In the second story of the "Man Who Awoke" series, Winters is given a *transformer* with which to change direct current to alternating current! A *transformer!* Ye gods and little fishes, how did that ever get past the "associate science editors who are nationally known educators who (don't) pass upon the scientific principles of all stories?" It is quite obvious that those scientists you list at the bottom of the editorial page never see the stories until they are printed. For the enlightenment of the editors and Mr. Manning, a transformer is used only to alter the voltage of an alternating current. To change direct to alternating current, a motor-generator must be used, a device in which the D.C. runs a motor, the motor operates a dynamo, and the dynamo produces A.C. But a *transformer!* Ugh!

And D. D. Sharp, in "Captive of the Crater," presents a perfect mess of gibberish that passes as science. On page 22 of the June issue he states that "his velocity now would be one-half gravity times square," which means exactly nothing, and would be entirely incorrect if it *did* mean anything. From time to time there have appeared other misconceptions, inconsistencies and errors most of which should have been corrected by the editor.

It was once part of your policy to encourage correspondence between your readers but lately you seem to be determined to prevent readers from corresponding. Are you afraid that they might tell each other how poor WONDER STORIES has become and that thereby you would lose a few readers? Each month there on the first page of "The Reader Speaks" is that little item "On Letters" in which you threaten to cut short any attempt on the part of a reader to say as much as he wishes. Yet you never carry out that threat, you never "give a resume of it in a single paragraph." Why do you not cease printing that item and employ the extra space obtained in that manner in printing the full addresses of your correspondents? It is very unpleasant to be prevented from writing to a person because you have failed to print his full address. I suggest that henceforth you do that and also let your readers write letters as long as they wish, and print them even at the cost of a page of fiction, for "The Reader Speaks" department has been and is at present the finest part of our magazine. You have been repeatedly told that.

Being one who has been with you since the first issue

(Continued on page 418)

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Description of male sex organs and their appearance—description of female sex organs and their appearance.

Purpose of sex organs—man's part and woman's part—difference between animals and human beings in use of sex organs—legal rights of husbands—a sin in marriage—husband's and wife's attitude—wrongful advice to bride—chastity vs passion—love, the teacher—the right way to happiness.

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TURN TO PAGE 291 OF THIS ISSUE AND READ COMPLETE DETAILS ABOUT EVERYDAY SCIENCE AND MECHANICS

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 410)

of W. S. and who has seen the magazine go through all its various alterations of size, shape, price, and quality, and who has grown up with "our" mag, I look upon WONDER STORIES as I would look upon a younger brother, and dislike to see the magazine stumble along in such a slovenly manner as it has been the last few months. I repeat, it is monotonous, and when a magazine such as this becomes monotonous, it loses readers surprisingly quick. Some time ago you remarked, in your comment upon a reader's letter, that if you felt that you were not doing your work properly, you would quit your job and turn it over to some one else. Well, I accuse you of having fallen down badly on the job and suggest that you let the readers decide whether I am right or not. I think they will not *all* demand my blood for accusing the editor of incompetence.

Now I am by nature a very peaceful person and wish no one any ill and so I would like to see the editor redeem himself and WONDER STORIES also in the next few issues. I have but one suggestion to make besides those given above, and that is that the editor really edit, in the fullest sense of the word.

Well, that's enough for the present. I would like to have you print this so as to see both your own and my fellow readers' reactions to the wails and complaints I have registered herein.

Yours regretfully,

MILTON KALETSKY,
New York, N. Y.

(Your new theory of the universe is interesting, and we give it to our readers for what it is worth without our comments.

The brickbat has been received with thanks. We believe you will like the new makeup of the magazine, as a number of changes have been made which we hope you will approve, and do away with the monotony.

As to the point of the "Man Who Awoke" we must take violent exception with the correspondent. In the first place, there are times when a transformer is not the usual cut and dried transformer. Thus, for instance, the usual transaformer of the old days does not work on alternating current but on direct current. The good old spark coil which rendered valuable service not only to experimenters, but on automobiles for ignition, for Dr. Nikola Tesla and his famous experiments, was a direct current transformer, as it worked with batteries. For many reasons, particularly for high frequency work, the old style spark coil transformer—because a transformer it is—is much better than the alternating current transformer, and, incidentally, will our correspondent take an oath that 10,000 years hence there might not be a direct current transformer of the type that might do things of which he cannot even dream of?

Mr. Sharp will probably answer our correspondent's criticism of his story, "Captive of the Crater," in a future issue.

As for the editor quitting his job, this has also been accomplished. You will note a new managing editor has been installed.

As to names and addresses of our readers, we found it necessary to leave them out for a number of very excellent reasons. We received too many complaints from readers whose names and addresses appeared in the magazine that they very often received scurrilous letters from other readers who did not take the same point of view as the correspondent. Much mischief also arose from various clubs who solicited memberships from these readers and collected various amounts of money for purposes that were never clear and many complaints were received on this score also. Finally, many foreign readers complained that they received a great many letters from the United States which were not properly stamped and the recipients were put to considerable expense to pay excess postage; and if there is one point the average foreigner is rabid about, it is excess postage which he has to pay for no good reason. For this, and many other reasons, it was deemed best to leave out names and addresses.

Now that we have this off our chest, you might tell us how you like the new issue in the small size.—EDITOR.)

From Our Old Friend Jack

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I am sorry that you were forced to combine the July and August issues of WONDER STORIES. I hate to think

of waiting two months for the next issue. May you never be forced to do it again.

The July-August issue I found a most absorbing one. Your new author, George A. Dye, has written something "different" in "The Mystery of Planet Deep." Full of mystery and exciting adventure. A story so unusual as to be never forgotten. I want to read more of Mr. Dye's work.

A fitting conclusion to "The Man Who Awoke" series is found in "The Elixir." In fact I'm sorry it had to end when it did. Anyway I found it thought-provoking and prophetic (?). Return soon, Mr. Manning.

"The Isotope Men" by another new author, Festus Pragnell, is also different from other science-fiction stories. In fact the past few issues of WONDER STORIES have shown that science fiction is not dying for want of new ideas. If new authors can continue to give us better stories, then by all means bring them on. Keep WONDER STORIES going so that we can continue reading true science fiction.

Glad to see the return of J. Harvey Haggard. I enjoyed "Castaways on Deimos" greatly. The same goes for "The Cosmic Horror" by another new author, Richard F. Searight.

I like the instalments of serials to be as long as the latest part of "The Radio Terror." I don't care so much for the story, though. How about giving the serials a cover once in a while?

For Paul, there is nothing but praise. His wonderful imagination makes the stories all the more interesting. I'd prefer that the covers each month had a different colored background. For instance, a scene on Deimos with a purple sky or one from "The Mystery of Planet Deep" with a dark green background.

Well—happy days, see you at the Fair!

JACK DARROW.
Chicago, Ill.

(Here is a contrast to the previous missile. We never fail to receive our regular comment from Mr. Darrow. His letters are refreshing and straight to the point. Faith in science fiction, such as yours, will assure it an eternal existence. You are correct in your opinion of new authors. Many fans too often judge a tale by the reputation of the author.—EDITOR.)

Sequel Wanted

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

I am overjoyed at the improvement made in the past few months by WONDER STORIES. It has risen to the point where it can truly be considered the leader in science fiction.

But I am writing this missive for one purpose only, and that is to request a sequel to that supreme story, "Beyond Pluto," by John Scott Campbell. In my estimation this is the *best* story that you have ever published, and it ended so that a sequel could easily be written. If you are personally supplying the stories, it is my sincere wish, in behalf of your readers, that a sequel be forthcoming in the very near future.

And another thing—are you going to discontinue the QUARTERLY for good? Great Guns, I hope not. The QUARTERLY was *the* Magazine of Science Fiction. In it we hoped to get the latest book-length stories complete in one issue—so for goodness sake, don't discontinue it for good.

I hope that these suggestions will aid you. I have the interests of WONDER STORIES at heart.

LEWIS F. TORRANCE
Winfield, Kan.

(We have taken up the matter of the sequel for the story "Beyond Pluto" with the author, Joseph Scott Campbell, and we hope that we will have such a sequel soon.

The QUARTERLY for the time being has been suspended, as it did not seem to work out during the depression. When things get better again we will resume publication.—EDITOR.)

His Wishes Fulfilled

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

In all the time I have been reading WONDER STORIES I have never gotten around to writing you. But at last I am here with my little say. First let me list the stories I have liked best.

(Continued on page 414)

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BACK NUMBERS

BACK Number scientific fiction magazines. Dale, 217 No. Illinois, Indianapolis, Indiana.

BIOLOGY

JOIN American Amateur Biologists Society. Lansing, Michigan. Sample Journal, 10c.

BOOKS

"THRU The Dragon Glass" printed pamphlet by A. Merritt, five cents a copy. Robert Scarlet, 87-36 162nd Street, Jamaica, New York.

CHEMISTRY

JOIN American Amateur Chemists Society. Journal, particulars, 10c. Lansing, Michigan.

DOGS

BEAUTIFUL Registered bull pups, $15. Bulldogs. 501-WS, Rockwood Street, Dallas, Texas.

FOR EXPERIMENTERS

EXPERIMENTERS, join science club. Monthly magazine and apparatus given free! Send 25c for membership now. Sciencecraft, W-5049 Bernard, Chicago, Ill.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 418)

Without question, I consider "Voice in the Void" without peer and the greatest science fiction story I have ever read. It appeared in one of the quarterlies. Clifford D. Simak was the author. It seems to me that a sequel could have been written to that tale. Then other good stories are "The Neptune Invasion," "Rebels of the Moon," "The Woman from Space," "Red Slag of Mars," "The Menace from Andromeda," "Martian Guns" (particularly good), "Derelicts of Ganymede" (a story like this is a relief with its sort of comedy), "The Eternal Dictator," "At Bay in the Void" (another wow), "Crossroads of Space," "In Martian Depths," "Red Flame of Venus," and others. You will note that these are all older stories of some months back. Perhaps you might notice that I like stories with their action on other planets and where there is a certain amount of intrigue mixed in it. Such stories give the authors greater scope for their imaginations. And then stories of invasion are always interesting. It is a revelation to read the ways in which these authors figure up the most devilish and incarnate methods of earth invasion. They range all the way from invasion with super-guns planted on the moon to biological terrors that are more subtle. I like a good, rousing fight once in a while.

Of the more recent stories I liked, "Revolt of the Scientists" (a possibility beyond a doubt), "The Man Who Awoke" (all the stories of this set), "The Moon Mines," "The Forgotten Man of Space," "The Cosmic Horror," "Castaways on Deimos," "The Isotope Men," "Monsters of Calisto," and the rest of the stories in the last issue. In fact it will be seen that I like practically every story you print. One or two I don't care for though.

One day I was trying to figure up a way to save these good stories without having too much bulk and keeping stories I didn't want. So what. I took out the stories I wanted, dumped the rest in the garbage and set to work building me a volume of these stories. I bound them myself and I am now getting quite a library of such stories. I like to read them over.

Now out of all this I am willing to swallow most of the stuff the writers put in their tales and take it for good reading. But I detest most time-machine stories. Going back or forwards it's all the same. I don't believe it and never will. It's soup. Once in a rare while a writer gets over a story that I can read and enjoy with that for its theme, but it's got to have a story back of it that's good.

I am in perfect agreement with Mr. Schaller concerning the bi-monthly issues. We want a monthly issue, nothing less, nothing more.

By the way, I was reading a book the other day and ran across a reference to a "time-machine." That in itself is not unusual, but the book was printed in 1698! The book was "The Story of the Sea."

In my opinion, I have a lot of them, I think that science fiction is beginning to get up in the world and starting to rank with the high-falutin' sort of junk. People are becoming interested. One of my friends who laughs at my interest in science fiction, the other day picked up one of the mags and started reading it!

People have said that no well-known or authors of the better sort ever dabbled in science fiction. Ha! But what about Jules Verne and our modern Mr. Edgar Rice Burroughs? Now there are other people who will read such impossible stuff as Tarzan and knock science fiction something fierce. After all aren't all tales improbable? But after all some of the so-called "trash," science fiction has proved true, even today!

But then pioneers always get the slams. But slams sometimes hit back! Keep up the good work, WONDER STORIES. You can't go wrong. You've got a swell publication and a great bunch of writers. You know everybody can't be satisfied, so go on as before. Strike the so-called "happy-medium" which I am sure you have now.

Yours sincerely,

J. STANLEY NIXON,
Buffalo, N. Y.

(We are glad that our correspondent liked a number of our stories, and it is to be hoped that he likes the present offering which contains quite a variety.

Time machines are not new, the first story of one was published by H. G. Wells in the 90s.

Science fiction is gaining new adherents all the time, and if our readers took the trouble to show WONDER STORIES assiduously to their friends, it would help science fiction a good deal, and, incidentally, would enable the

publishers to put out a far better and greater magazine. The reason is simple; during the depression, it was not possible to publish the magazine profitably. Indeed, it was published at a great loss. If the circulation is doubled, the expense of buying stories is cut in half because the cost is spread over the larger amount of printed copies.

Always remember, that when you are thinking of science fiction you are working for a cause. You are reading the magazine because you believe in science fiction, and science fiction cannot advance unless it has the full-hearted support of every single reader.—EDITOR.)

Attention, Baron!

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

In response to the Baron's effusive criticisms, may I suggest that it is the Baron who is degenerating, not the magazine. It must be gratifying to the editor to know that the Baron, at least, approves of the printing. The illustrations that are so objectionable to the Baron are, perhaps, beyond his scope of appreciation as is his understanding of the scientific mind and its creations. How provoking life must be to the Baron since life is nothing but barbaric warfare in one respect or other. Evidently the Baron is a realist, so naturally, he cannot recognize the merits of melodrama. The masterpieces of fiction, poetry and literature abound with the descriptive similes and expressions that the Baron detests so thoroughly, and also, the Baron has plainly manifested an abnormal aversion for harmless advertisements.

The magazine, in my estimation, is the acme of all scientific fiction, and, in all due respect to the Baron's suggestions, I cherish the hope that the editor will continue the magazine in its entertaining and educating form. I will take this opportunity to compliment the publishers on the return of the twenty-five-cent size.

"SHARLIE,"
Chicago, Ill.

(We hope that the Baron can take it, for it looks as though "Sharlie vas dere" after all. However, he should be satisfied with the illustrations in this issue, which are not all by Paul.—EDITOR.)

When the Century Ends

Editor, WONDER STORIES:

Could you please tell me whether the twentieth century ends on December 31, 1999, at 12:00 p.m., or December 31, 2000, at 12:00 p.m. I desire to know because it is an important factor in a story that I am writing.

Also, could you inform us whether or not that "Master Maniac" (as Mr. Green of Los Angeles calls him) or "Epaminondas T. Snooks," is genuine or not genuine, and whether he is actually crazy or if he is sincere? I noticed the last telegram he sent you (July-August issue) and am still wondering. Please ask him how he communicates with the Martians and Jovians.

PAUL J. SYKES,
President, Science Study Club,
Vancouver, B. C.

(Since the first century, A. D., began with Jan. 1, of the year 1, it ended with December 31, of the year 100, consequently, the twentieth century will end with December 31, of the year 2000, at midnight—unless the calendar shall undergo some unforeseen reform. It may be noted here that, of course, the people of the first century did not think of themselves as such; for our system of reckoning the years was not adopted until hundreds of years later. The dates of previous events were then transferred to the system of reckoning by years B. C. and A. D., with which we are familiar. The centuries are, of course, purely artificial divisions of time, and have nothing to do with any natural periods.

Dr. Snooks radios us: "Reports of my insanity have been, I hope, greatly exaggerated. Normally, I am quite genuine and sincere, but have been on a vacation pending passage of intergalactic recovery act. Martian-Jovian communication system effected on micro-dimensional waves diffracted by space curvature. Recent Saturnian disturbance result of Jovian message ricochetting from red planet. Full details later. Message ends."—EDITOR.)

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LIST OF PLATES

Plate	I.	Nude Adult Female
"	II.	Nude Adult Male
"	III.	Nervous System of Female
"	IV.	Skeletal System
"	V.	Muscular System (Posterior)
"	VI.	Muscular System (Anterior)
"	VII.	Vascular System
"	VIII.	Respiratory System
"	IX.	Digestive System
"	X.	Male Genital Organ in Detail
"	XI.	Female Genital Organ in Detail
"	XII.	Cross-Section of Pregnant Female Body with Child.

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Thus far, plates such as those presented here have been so high in price as to be inaccessible to the public. Our plan in producing these charts is to make them available to every adult person.

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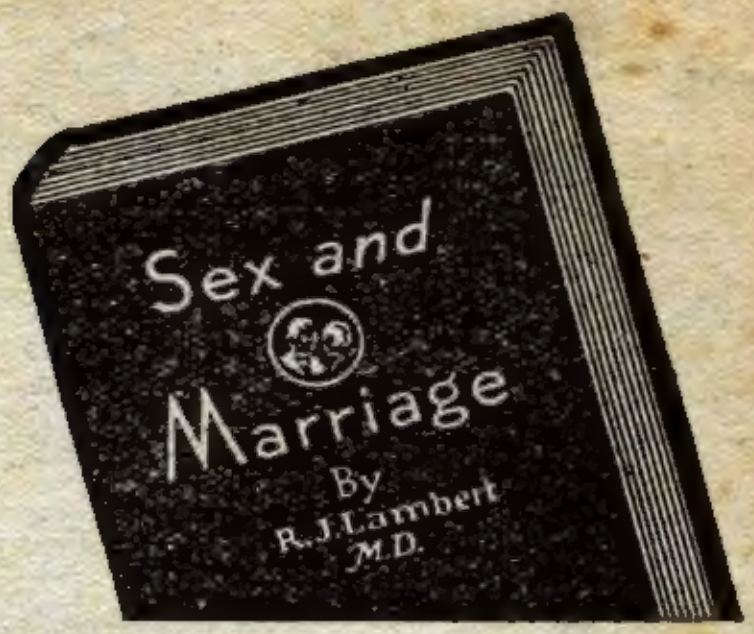

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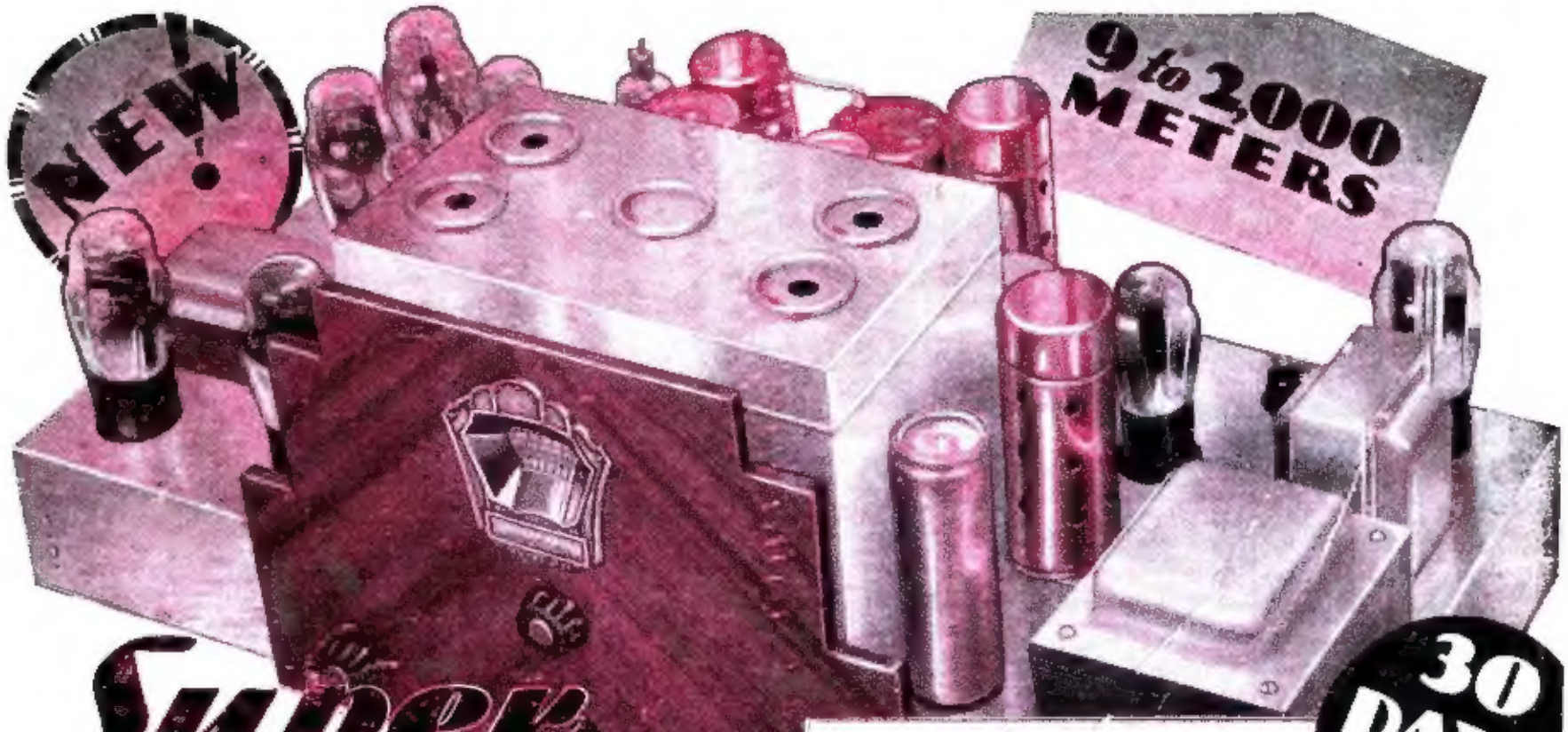

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